A Cry for Justice

Prof. John E. McFadyen, D.D.

The Short Course Series

Donald Smith

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A CRY FOR JUSTICE

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The Short Course Series

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A CRY FOR JUSTICE

A STUDY IN AMOS

BY

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"COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS,"
"COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH," ETC.

EDINBURGH: T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET
1912

Printed by
MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED,
FOR
T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH.
LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT, AND CO. LIMITED.
NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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"It would appear that the unjust thing has no friend in the Heaven, and a majority against it on the Earth; nay that *it* has at bottom all men for its enemies; that it may take shelter in this fallacy and then in that, but will be hunted from fallacy to fallacy till it find no fallacy to shelter in any more, but must march and go elsewhither;—that, in a word, it ought to prepare incessantly for decent departure, before *in*decent departure, ignominious drumming out, nay savage smiting out and burning out, overtake it! Alas, was that such new tidings? Is it not from of old indubitable, that Untruth, Injustice which is but acted untruth, has no power to continue in this true Universe of ours? The tidings was world-old, or older, as old as the Fall of Lucifer: and yet in that epoch unhappily it was new tidings, unexpected, incredible; and there had to be such earthquakes and shakings of the nations before it could be listened to, and laid to heart even slightly! Let us lay it to heart, let us know it well, that new shakings be not needed."

CARLYLE, *Chartism*, ch. v.

THE LION'S ROAR.

"The words of Amos . . . two years before the earthquake" (i. 1).

"The LORD will roar from Zion" (i. 2).

"I will not turn it back" (i. 3).

Two years before the earthquake! What an ominous beginning! But no words could better introduce the stern book of Amos. The world into which it ushers us is a world crowded with wrong of every kind, as we shall abundantly see—of false worship and social injustice. Such a world needed to be shaken, and Amos knew that it would be. That, indeed, is the burden of his message; and already in the opening words the rumbling of the coming shock is heard.

Sharp ears, however, were needed to detect it. To the average man of those days, society must have seemed stable enough. For the time was about the middle of the

eighth century B.C.—the splendid days of Jeroboam the second of Israel, whose long and brilliant reign had been marked by peace and prosperity. But not far beneath this shining surface the clear eyes of Amos saw the symptoms of rottenness and inevitable decay; and the words of his first recorded message are that Jehovah, the God of this easy-going people, would roar from His temple in Jerusalem, like a lion just before he makes his spring. The implication is that Jehovah will soon spring upon His people, to tear them in pieces; and Amos's message we might describe as the Gospel of the Lion's Roar.

The man who thus boldly announces his appalling message was a shepherd, accustomed to the stern scenery of the Judæan hills, where he tended his sheep, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. The Dead Sea was not far off; and it is very possible that the loneliness and ruggedness of his surroundings deepened the native sternness of his soul. Among the sheep and the frowning scenery he had time to brood over the sins

and follies of the nation, and of the doom upon which he knew in his soul that she was rushing; and he flashes, meteor-like, upon his audience—gathered, apparently, at some sanctuary for worship—with his brief but awful message that the God they worshipped would roar and spring upon them; or, changing the figure, that He would come in the terrible storm, and utter His word of thunder, and wither all their beautiful land from the south to the north, even to Carmel, the noble, densely-wooded mount, on which a hundred years before the cause of Jehovah had been so triumphantly vindicated in the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

Amos is a Judæan; but it is nearly, if not always, Israel, the sister kingdom to the north, and not his own kingdom, that he addresses; and this, too, may partly explain the almost unmitigated severity of his message. Such a people deserves to be torn in pieces, such a land deserves to wither. Amos knows that the storm is coming, he knows that it must come. His heart tells

him so, his God tells him so. The sound of the coming storm is already in his ears. God works His dread will by human agents ; and there was, in the world of Amos's day, a power capable of inflicting irreparable hurt upon Israel in the Assyrians. Already their mighty hand had been felt in the west ; and Amos, who knew how to read the signs of the times, saw what this gradual advance must ultimately mean for Israel, especially for an Israel which deserved the wrath of God.

Then, without warning, the prophet suddenly passes from this vision of the land of Israel, withered and in mourning, to a series of stern oracles which affect not Israel, but her heathen neighbours. These oracles are characterized by a fine impressive symmetry. They all begin : "Thus saith Jehovah, For three transgressions, and for four, I will not turn it back." They then name one sin, as a specimen, out of the many which justify the doom ; then they go on to describe that doom in terms of devouring fire —" I will send a fire, and it shall devour the

palaces." There is a certain fierce grandeur about these successive oracles which march inexorably on to the repeated refrain of doom, and culminate in their surprising and incredible announcement of the doom of Israel herself. But the prophet's audience does not yet know how they will culminate, and they listen with complacency and delight to the announcement of the blow that is to annihilate the peoples, one after another,—with all the more complacency, as all these peoples had been, either in the remote or recent past, enemies of Israel. To a nation surrounded as she was by enemies on every hand, no news could be more welcome than that their doom was sealed and certain.

It is worth noting, to begin with, that Jehovah, the God in whose name Amos speaks, is interested in the moral conduct of men beyond the borders of Israel. Already, at the very beginning, we are led to feel that this God of Israel is no mere petty national God, but one whose "eyes behold the world, whose eyelids try the children of men" in every land (Ps. xi. 4), and that He will

punish sin wherever He finds it. Each of the nations mentioned is guilty of "three transgressions, yea, four"—the Hebrew way of saying, of accumulated transgressions: three would he terrible, four are intolerable. The sins are quite concrete and definite, Amos could put his finger on them; but in each case he mentions only one as typical, and hints that there are many more like that; so that among the foreign nations we are given to understand that the cup of iniquity is running over, and the direst doom is richly deserved. If we carefully note the sins which Jehovah punishes as they come up one by one, we shall learn where His interests lie, and what conception the prophet held of His character.

The first to be denounced are the Syrians, the people lying to the north-east of Israel, whose capital was Damascus. During the time of Elisha they had harassed Israel very severely; and in the border warfare Gilead, the district east of the Jordan, and consequently most exposed to border raids, had been ravaged by Syria with a cruelty so com-

plete that it could only be compared to the driving of sharp and heavy threshing-boards over the corn. Now to the God whom Amos worships all kinds of inhumanity are detestable, and He cannot allow it to pass unpunished. In the solemn words of Amos, which are even simpler in the Hebrew than in the English version, He "will not turn it back." The "it" may be some previous threat of Amos, but it is perhaps more in accordance with the prophet's manner to regard it as that mysterious Something which inevitably follows in the trail of sin. The world, as Amos saw it, was a world of law, a world in which deeds carried consequences, and causes produced effects. Sin drags Something on: on It is coming, nearer and nearer, and "I will not turn it back." Here for the first time we get a glimpse of that stern conception of law which Amos saw to run throughout God's well-built and ordered world. Nor is it an empty threat that he utters: the Assyrians are there to execute it. The fire of war, Amos knows, will soon be kindled in those ruthless lands which defy

the great elemental laws of justice and pity, more especially will it rage among the royal palaces and the houses of the great grandees, till the flames have devoured them completely. The power of the rulers will be broken and the people swept into exile, back to the land from which long ago they had come (cf. ix. 7). The threat was fulfilled: within twenty years, Damascus fell before Assyria. It is not without significance that here, as in all the succeeding announcements of doom, Amos singles out the palaces for special mention. The shepherd, who loves the sheep and the wilderness, and who believes in the simple life, hates them with a perfect hatred; and he thinks with a certain grim delight of the day when they will be reduced to ashes by the devouring fire.

Everywhere among the nations round about Israel, Amos sees with sorrow and indignation the same fundamental pieties violated, the same cruel atrocities perpetrated, and he foresees that they will all be involved in a common doom. The sinners would

perish "with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest on the day of the whirlwind" of war. Even the geographical order in which he names the peoples whose sins he denounces has a subtle significance of its own. Israel is surrounded by nations whose sins are appalling and whose doom is certain. It is a dangerous thing to live in such an environment, compassed about by the sinful and the doomed; and the preacher is skilfully preparing for his announcement of the blow which is to smite Israel—for she, too, is guilty — in the universal ruin. From Damascus in the north-east, his gaze sweeps across to the Philistines in the south-west, then north to Tyre and the Phœnicians, across Israel again south-east to Edom, then north to Ammon, then south to Moab. Round about Israel, north, east, south, and west, rages the storm of doom.

And why? In every case, for three transgressions and for four; that is, for an accumulated record of sin, such as the cruelty in war of which we have seen the Syrians to be guilty. That cruelty is matched by others

in the other nations. In the Philistines and Phœnicians, it is the heartless slave-trade that stirs the prophet to indignation; in the Edomites, it is the pitiless and relentless hatred with which they had harassed brother Israel, and "pursued him with the sword"; in the Ammonites, it is their unspeakable barbarity to women in a war whose only justification was the extension of territory; in the Moabites, it is the insolence with which they had defied and insulted the pieties universally cherished towards the dead, by burning to ashes the body of their fallen foe. The world round about Israel was a cruel world, which trampled remorselessly upon the fundamental sanctities of life and liberty and pity and respect for the dead; and to a man of Amos's religious temper it was only just that they in turn should be trampled beneath the iron heel of Assyria.

Then, swift as lightning, Amos hurls his blow at Israel herself. His audience had listened thus far with delight to the announcement of the doom of their neighbours. Imagine their horror to be told by a prophet

of their own that a similar doom, stern and irrevocable, was in store for them too. For they, too, had been guilty of three transgressions, yea, four. Their sin, like all sin, had dragged a terrible Something on ; on It was coming, and Jehovah would not turn It back. But horrible as this announcement must have been, we have seen that the whole argument of Amos had been a subtle preparation for it. Israel was surrounded by people who were doomed because they had repudiated the reasonable moral demands which had been written by the finger of God upon every unsophisticated conscience ; and how, then, could she escape—how, then, should she escape—if she neglected and defied those great demands ? She was comprehended under the same moral law as the nations about her, with its simple demands and its inexorable penalties ; was there anything unreasonable in this, that she—she especially, to whom in the providence of God had been granted nobler traditions and purer ideals—should be comprehended under the doom which was to sweep so surely over them ?

A Cry for Justice

We begin to get close to the beating heart of Amos when we note what are the sins which vex and provoke him in his own people, and it is natural that he should detail them much more fully than in the case of the foreign nations. The sins which Amos, like other prophets, denounces, are nearly always social sins, wrongs done to the neighbour, especially the helpless neighbour. His very first charge against Israel is dictated by his overwhelming interest in the poor and needy. The cruelty which Amos denounced in Israel's neighbours is repeated on a more bewildering scale by Israel herself; there it was cruelty to the captive, here it is cruelty to the poor. This, to Amos, is the sin of sins, that the lives of the poor should be bartered for money, that for economic gain they should be sold into slavery or trampled to the dust by those who have them in their power, and that the very courts which should have given redress and made such atrocities impossible, were themselves corrupt and venal, so that the love of money poisoned justice at its source. The class whose privilege

and duty it was to protect the poor exploited them. Nothing stirs the blood of Amos like that: that is why it comes first and foremost in his indictment.

But two other influences were degrading and destroying the life of the time—immorality and intemperance; the collocation itself is a suggestive one. And, incredible as it may seem to us, these vices were actually associated with the public worship of God. Women were attached to the sanctuaries, as in parts of India to-day, with results which can more readily be imagined than described; the sacred places so called rang with sounds of revelry, and witnessed deeds of robbery and lust. A merciful law had provided that the garment which a poor man had been obliged to pledge must be returned to him before sunset; but in these sanctuaries, where of all places justice ought to have been done, the law was shamelessly violated, the poor man was cruelly wronged. For it was these very garments that the drunken and immoral worshippers made use of for their own convenience; and the money

which paid for the wine they drank came from fines imposed, doubtless often unjustly, upon those who had come to consult the venal priests.

This picture of Jehovah's people is as ugly as it could be—given over as they were to wine and women, to love of money and oppression of the poor, and cloaking much of this wrong in the holy garb of religion. But what made this conduct so peculiarly detestable was that it was a sin against light and privilege. Israel knew well enough the difference between right and wrong; the sister nations, as we have seen, are held guilty because they had defied it. But besides this knowledge, which alone would have rendered her inexcusable, the love of God had been shed abroad very conspicuously over all her national history. No one who knew the facts could deny that Jehovah had cared for the people. In the early days—some four centuries and a half before—He had brought them up out of a land and state of slavery, He had led them lovingly through the great and terrible wilderness, and settled

them at last safely, in face of the mightiest opposition from native tribes who are described as "strong as the oaks and high as the cedars," in the splendid land upon which they had proved so unfaithful to Him. More than that ; for better than land and victory is the gift of men, and this, too, God had given. He had sent them nazirites to protest by their abstinence against the wine which was already showing itself a national peril ; He had sent them prophets, like Nathan and Elijah and Amos himself, to interpret His will and declare His demands, to champion right against might, and to protest, by their courageous words, against every attempt to defraud or crush the poor. But how had these gifts been received ? They had been received with scorn and violence. The men who stood for the better things in Israel had been ignored or shunned or silenced. Deliberate attempts had been made to induce abstainers to break their most solemn pledge, and to stop the honest mouths of the prophets. Amos did not need to go back to ancient history for his

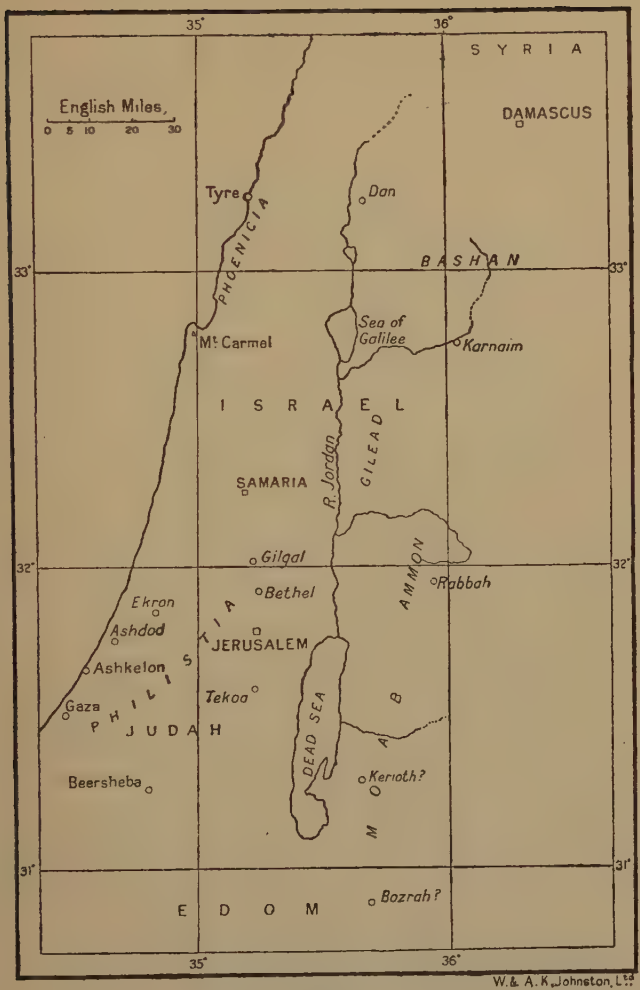
illustrations; his own mouth had been stopped, as we shall see in chapter seven, by no less a man than the foremost Churchman of the day.

So Israel's sin is deeper and blacker than that of other nations. She had sinned not only against conscience, but against the manifest love of God and against the special revelations of His will. She had acted against her better knowledge, and she had turned a deaf ear and a stubborn heart to the message of her great preachers. But no man and no nation can do these things with impunity. The doom is inescapable, and "I will not turn it back." This time it is described in terms of that country life which Amos knew so well. The cart piled so heavy and high with sheaves that it sways to and fro as it moves along, is to him a symbol of the shaking and tottering that is in store for Israel. "Behold, I will make the ground totter beneath you, as a cart tottereth that is full of sheaves." The very land will reel, when Jehovah smites it with His mighty hand. The blow which

Amos anticipates may be here, as elsewhere, the blow of war : or it may be a threat of an earthquake. But whatever the doom may be, the land will stagger under it, and from it there will be no escape. It will be a doom which the strongest cannot repel, nor the swiftest outrun. That, according to Amos, is what will happen to the nation which crushes its poor, which panders to its lust, which stifles its conscience, which rejects its preachers, which forgets its God. In the face of modern conditions, can we say that this warning is obsolete ?

TO ILLUSTRATE AMOS

(Especially Chapters I. and II.)



HOW SHALL ISRAEL ESCAPE?

AMOS III.

THE INEXORABLENESS OF LAW.

"You only have I known . . . therefore I will punish you" (iii. 2).

Amos was only a simple shepherd, but we have just seen how wide was the range of his political and religious vision. There was not a man in Israel who watched more closely or understood so perfectly the national and international situation of his day. From his solitude he carefully observed all the signs of the times. He knew the world in which he lived, and the God whose laws he sought to lay upon the conscience of his people, and these are the two indispensable conditions of effective preaching. But though the nations beyond Israel are within his horizon, it is, as we have seen, upon Israel herself that he concentrates the passion of his soul. The preacher is a patriot. He is concerned first of all with the condition of his own country:

it is there, and among his own people, that anything he can do for God and the world has, for the most part, to be done. So, after his indignant challenge and denunciation of the foreign nations for the cruelties which had marked their conduct towards each other, he turns his sorrowful eyes to his own people, and throughout the rest of the message which makes up his book, he keeps them steadily fixed upon the sins by which they had insulted God and wronged one another, and upon the doom to which those sins were so surely bearing them.

But behind the book we must always remember that there is a living man addressing a message of overwhelming importance to a real audience. The words which still flash and burn even upon the pages of Amos never allow us to forget that for long. "Listen," he begins, "listen to this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel." The words which he is about to utter are his own: but so conscious is he of being divinely inspired as he utters them, that he can describe them as the words

of God Himself. The message to which he solemnly calls attention begins thus: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." In the Old Testament, "to know" often means "to care for," to know not only with the understanding but with the heart; and this word of the prophet is simply a strong expression for the unique place which God had assigned to Israel in the world. It does not mean that He cared for Israel only, and not at all for the rest of the world: least of all could it mean this in Amos, who believed, as we have already seen, that God was deeply concerned with the moral welfare of all the surrounding nations, and who had, as we shall see very clearly later on, a passionate faith in Jehovah as the God of all history, controlling the migrations of other nations no less than Israel's exodus from Egypt (cf. ix. 7). But it does mean that God had drawn specially near to Israel —that, in some perfectly real sense, He had made a covenant with her, as the Old Testament phrase has it—and this is one of the most indubitable facts of history. To watch

how Christianity has covered the world with her beneficent influence, and to remember that Christianity is the daughter of Judaism, is to be persuaded that Judaism is no accident, but a Providence, and that the Hebrew people were, as they believed themselves to be, called of God to a place of unique distinction among the nations of the world. The people of Amos's time had no doubt of their election. God had started them on their career as a nation by delivering them from the bondage of Egypt. He had brought them through the wilderness and settled them on the goodly land of Canaan; and, as Amos had reminded them (ii. 11), He had given them a succession of earnest men to interpret His will by word and deed. They believed in their election without understanding the reasons for it; they failed to realize that election to privilege is always election to duty and responsibility. But on the simple fact of their election, Amos and his audience were at one; and they would listen with satisfaction to the comfortable doctrine that fell, in the first sentence, from

the preacher's lips, and that seemed to flatter their national vanity—"you only have I known of all the families of the earth."

"Therefore"—the preacher went on—and probably not one of his hearers had any doubt or misgiving as to what was to follow. From such premises there could be but one conclusion: "therefore I will bless you abundantly. I will be ever at your right hand, so that you shall never be moved. I will protect and defend you. I will give you peace, prosperity, and victory. I will bless your going out and coming in, and set you on high above all the nations of the earth." Jehovah was bound to do all this, bound by His election of them, bound by the covenant He had made with them and the favours He had already bestowed upon them—bound, at any rate, so long as they did their part; and their part, as they imagined, was to offer Him animal sacrifice and sumptuous ceremonial. What must have been their indignation, their horror, when this strange preacher followed up his "therefore" by the words "I will punish you"? "This terrible 'therefore,'"

as one has said, "must have been as a bolt from the blue." They must have listened with an amazement which would break into fury to the audacious, blasphemous words of the rugged preacher. For blasphemous they must have sounded to those orthodox ears. Jehovah, they argued, must be true to His people, so long as they were true to Him; and they were, as we shall see, serving Him most assiduously, after their own ceremonial, superficial style. The prophet's impious conclusion contradicted not only the popular creed, but the indubitable fact of the nation's existing prosperity, which, to the popular mind, was a sure sign of the divine favour. So Amos's pronouncement was at once a lie, a heresy, and a blasphemy. His message was unwelcome, because it disturbed the comfortable equanimity of his audience, and dealt a blow at their most cherished convictions. Starting from the same premises, Amos reached a conclusion diametrically opposite to theirs, because his conception of the character of God was a whole world apart from theirs. The demands of the God he

worshipped were for a just and honourable social life, and He would not be put off with ceremonial, however splendid. Their lives, however, were stained with deliberate sin; sin inevitably drags Something on, and "I will not turn it back. I will come and visit you indeed—not, however, to bless, but to smite you, *for all your iniquities*"—the intemperance, the immorality, and above all the oppression of the poor, which he has already drawn for us in such lurid colours. "You only have I known . . . therefore I will punish you." The conclusion which so appalled his hearers, was the most natural and logical in the world to Amos. Just because God had cared for them so deeply, He must punish them so severely. Special privilege means special responsibility; and if that be evaded or mocked, then destruction is at the doors.

The people are horrified at the message of this unknown and unauthorized stranger. Who is he, they ask, this rough man who has so defiantly challenged their ancient creed, and by what authority has he dared by

his gloomy threats to disturb the joy of their sacred festival? In a very powerful passage which leads up to a splendid climax, Amos justifies his appearance and his message. For these things there is an adequate cause, as there is for everything in the universe. Here Amos sets forth with unusual power that wonderful conception, of which we have already had a glimpse, of the reign of law which he sees to control the world. Nothing is isolated or haphazard: for every phenomenon there is a rational explanation. Every event has a cause, and for illustration he points his hearers, like the skilful speaker that he is, to incidents in the life with which he and they were familiar. Two people are seen walking together: what may we infer from that? That they have made a tryst, or at least that they know each other. Throughout the world, *this* answers to *that*: there is a meaning and a cause for everything. But it is highly characteristic of the grim mind of Amos that all his subsequent illustrations of the great law of cause and effect are stern. Law reigns, and law is a stern thing; the

man or the nation that fails to recognize this is living in a fool's Paradise. Lions, snares, and war—it is from these fierce things that Amos draws his illustrations. If you hear a lion roaring in the forest—and Amos in his shepherd life has heard one many a time—what may you infer from that? Is it not a sign that he has caught something? The roar means that he has sprung upon some poor little sheep, and is tearing it in pieces; and we cannot help thinking—though this is not in the direct line of his argument—of that earlier threat of Amos's in which he had compared Jehovah Himself to a lion about to roar and spring upon His people. Again, if you see a snare flying up suddenly from the ground, what does that mean? for in God's world everything means something. It means that some unhappy little bird has been caught in its cruel meshes. And this stern law runs everywhere, through the city as well as the country. If you hear the sudden blare of the trumpet in the city, what does that mean? It means the alarum of war: the enemy are near and the people are

terrified. If a catastrophe overtakes a city, Jehovah is behind it, as He is behind everything.

Now surely Amos has made his point abundantly clear. His message, like everything else in the world, has a cause: he appears as he does and says what he says, because Jehovah has told him His secret—the awful secret of Israel's doom—and has sent him to declare it. The prophet is Jehovah's servant, who knows his master's bidding and does his master's will, and the terrible words with which he startled his incredulous hearers are the words of none other than God: "Surely the Lord Jehovah does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets." Amos himself is in the grasp of that great law which explains and runs through all the phenomena of the universe, or rather of that great Person who is behind all phenomena. The great Cause which explains the prophet's appearance and justifies his message is Almighty God Himself. "When the lion roars, who is not afraid? and when the Lord Jehovah

speaks "—and he had spoken loudly enough in the events of the time and to the soul of Amos—"who can help prophesying?" He preaches, because he must.

Now he is free to go on with his challenge; and in support of his condemnation of Israel he appeals to imaginary spectators from other lands less privileged than Israel; for even those untutored hearts would be more than shocked by the evils that were rampant there. He appeals to a wider audience than those immoral ritualists who crowded the sanctuaries, while they crushed the poor. He appeals to that moral sense which Israel had repudiated, and which it least of all became her, with her peculiar privileges, to repudiate, for it was the common heritage of humanity. He appeals to the Philistines (or perhaps the Assyrians)[1] and the Egyptians. He summons this imaginary crowd of hated foreigners, in whose heart there yet flickers a spark of humanity and justice, to gather on the mountains round about Samaria, the capital of the kingdom, and from this height to look down into the

[1] So the Septuagint reads in iii. 9.

wicked city. And, when they look, what do they see? Just what you might except they would see among a people whom peace and prosperity, succeeding the ravages of war, had left free for the unscrupulous prosecution of trade and commerce, and who were too blind to read the signs of the times, too deaf to hear the roll of Jehovah's thunder which smote from afar so distinctly upon the ears of Amos. Confusion and oppression—that was what was to be seen in the midst of Samaria. They would see gorgeous palaces, with inlaid work of ivory and ebony, filled with the ill-gotten gains of violence and robbery. They would see indolent nobles sitting on their fine silk couches—nobles who, not content with a single palace all the year round, must needs have a house for winter and a house for summer. In the light of all this luxury, resting on iniquity, it is not hard to understand the scorn and indignation of the shepherd of Tekoa, who knew in his heart that such pride must provoke the avenging justice of God. Can we wonder at his threat that an enemy would one day

encompass the land—already the tramp of their hosts is in his ears—and lay all that cruel and haughty luxury in the dust?

The simple explanation of all this social injustice, which was to cost the people so dear, is, as Amos says, that *they did not know* to do the straightforward thing, they had lost all ideas of right and wrong. But that did not excuse them. They did not know, but they should have known; the very heathen knew,—the Assyrians and the Egyptians to whom Amos appealed,—and even they would have been shocked at the confusion and oppression which reigned in Hebrew society. In the mad haste after riches, in the dissolute luxury of city life, they had lost touch with the eternal facts, they had forgotten God's everlasting and inexorable laws; they had no time for reflection, no interest in it, no eyes for facts that would have been plain and probable enough to thinking men, no ears for the rumbling thunder that foretold the storm. To such a civilization, with no heart for the needless sorrows of the poor, and no mind for anything but the exploitation of the

weaker members of society, there can be but one end. The God whom it has insulted, will smite it, the whole of it, the holiest and most cherished emblems of its religion no less than the symbols of its social and political splendour; its churches and its palaces alike will be laid, by the terrible hand of the enemy whom He will send, in one welter of ruin. When we remember that the sanctuary of Bethel was the royal chapel (vii. 13) hallowed by ancient and precious traditions associated with the name of father Jacob, we can imagine the horrified looks upon the faces of Amos's hearers when he announced that the very horns of its altar would be hewn off and dashed to the ground. What blasphemy! and this fierce message was delivered, too, in the name of the very God to whose sanctuaries the people were so zealously flocking. Impossible, incredible, away with him!

Even granting that there might be a measure of truth in what he said, at the worst there would always be a remnant, they argued; the annihilation could not be com-

plete, some would be saved. Yes, says Amos, in his grim and terrible way, some of you will be saved. But this will be the manner of your salvation : "As a shepherd saves a pair of legs or a piece of an ear from the mouth of a lion, *so* shall the children of Israel be saved." The lion will come and tear the poor silly sheep in pieces, and mangle it so horribly that only a few fragments will be left to identify it. The Assyrians will come and tear you in pieces and smash your civilization into atoms, and there will only be a few fragments, a few survivors left, whereby it and you may be identified. You are welcome to call that salvation, if you think it worth your while. But do not deceive yourselves. God will not be mocked, the destruction will be very complete. The places of worship will be hurled to the ground, "and I will smite the winter house with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the houses of ebony shall have an end."

AMOS IV.

THE SEVERITY OF GOD.

"I have smitten you . . . yet ye did not return unto Me" (iv. 9).

No one can deny that Amos had the courage of his convictions. There is something superb in the daring with which he faces the happy crowd of worshippers and declares that, because their social life is cruel and rotten and their religion nothing but a gorgeous sham, the day is speedily coming when God will sweep it all away, levelling their ancient places of worship and their palatial mansions with the ground. Now he turns to the women — the wives of the aristocracy and the well-to-do—and hurls at them a speech as scathing as any that has ever caused the ears of haughty dames to tingle. "Listen," he says, "you cattle, to this word of mine, this word of God's." With a contempt which sounds almost coarse

to delicate modern ears, but which in reality is as just as it is vivid and drastic, he compares the fine ladies of Samaria to the sleek and well-fed cattle that roam on the famous pastures east of the Sea of Galilee. All the Hebrew prophets know that for the temper and quality of a civilization the women are greatly responsible. A country is largely what its women make it; if they are cruel or careless or unwomanly, the country is on the road to ruin. But these cattle on the hills of Samaria at whom Amos flings his words of scorn are worse than the cattle on the hills of Bashan; for they have done what no animal could do—they have made coarse pleasure the deliberate end of life. They are fit partners for the lords already denounced, who "store up violence and robbery in their palaces" (iii. 10). "Bring," they say, "and let us drink"—them and their lords together. If that were all, it would be bad enough; for drink, as we have seen, was one of the national perils of the day (ii. 8, 12), and no sight can be uglier than a drunken woman. But that is not all.

The money that pays for the wine is got by crushing the poor. "Bring," they say, in their haughty impatience; so long as they have it, they care not a whit where it is brought from. And, to get it, those who are already poor enough will have to be ground and crushed yet more; in the strong and vivid Hebrew words you can almost hear the crunching of the bones (cf. Mic. iii. 3). Intemperance and cruelty went together then, as they go so often still. When women, who should be pitiful, sink to such depths of shame and heartlessness, it must be made plain that God will soon appear to mete out to them what they had meted to the poor. So He swears by His holiness—that holiness which these cruel and drunken women have so brutally insulted in the persons of the poor—He swears, that is, a solemn binding oath, that "days are coming"—not the yet more brilliant and prosperous days to which the light-hearted people looked forward (cf. v. 18), but days when the foemen would surround the mountain city in which they trusted, and batter in the walls, and drag

them away, one and all ; and, as the hook of the angler jerks the fish suddenly and violently out of the element with which it is familiar, so would they be whisked away from their silken couches and their strong city to a fate even more awful than that to which they had reduced the poor. Their womanly honour would be exposed to insult, and helplessly they would have to submit. It would then be too late for repentance, too late even to gather together the things they loved. Through the breaches that the enemy would make in the walls of the beleaguered city they would be dragged to their awful doom.

How furious must the women and their lords have been at the threats of this unconventional stranger ! Indeed, the whole people would be indignant at the very mention of this coming national catastrophe which Amos announces as a certainty, thus manifestly branding himself in their eyes as an unpatriotic blasphemer. They angrily repel his threats of doom by pointing to the zeal, the costliness, the splendour of their

worship. "Are we not faithful," they ask, "in our attendance at the places of worship? Do we not make regular pilgrimages to the ancient sanctuaries? and could anything surpass the devotion which we there show to our God? Do we not pay Him His dues, and more than His dues? Do we not, in our zeal, seek to make our offerings even more worthy of our God by the use of leaven? We are not only just, but generous in our relations to Him, and prompt in rendering Him the service that is His due. We offer the prescribed sacrifices the very morning after we arrive at the sanctuary, and the very next day after that we present our tithes, following the custom of father Jacob long ago on this very spot at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 22). Nay, over and above the gifts prescribed by law, we give evidence of our glad devotion by presenting freewill offerings of our own."

To this elaborate self-defence the prophet replies with bitter irony: "Go to Bethel and transgress; to Gilgal"—another sanctuary—"and multiply transgression." He does

not say, "Go to Bethel and worship," but "Go to Bethel and transgress": by which he means that their very worship was a sin. We have already seen that some of the practices indulged in at the sacred places were positively and shockingly immoral (ii. 7 f.), but here Amos practically condemns their whole conception of worship as immoral. With an almost impetuous zeal they had offered their tithes and their sacrifices, they had promptly and generously paid their sanctuary dues, they had made a parade of their freewill offerings. But the true service of Jehovah did not consist in these things at all. "That is what *you* like," he says, turning to them in bitter scorn; but that is not what Jehovah likes. He hates and despises a ceremony which recognizes no moral obligation, just as much as He hates your palaces (v. 21, vi. 8). These two tragic follies are connected by the closest bond. You exploit men, because you misunderstand God; you are cruel to the poor, because you have no proper idea of what religion is, and demands. What you care much for, God

cares nothing for. Is this not the service that He demands, to let the oppressed go free, to cover the naked, to deal bread to the hungry, to bring the outcasts home (Isa. lviii. 6 f.). Here we strike upon the fundamental difference between Amos and his contemporaries, and this in general is the feature of Hebrew prophecy which invests it with permanent interest and importance. To the people, religion was a matter of ceremony; that was what *they* loved: to the prophets it was a matter of character and social service, resting upon a humble walk with God (Mic. vi. 8). We shall come upon this distinction again and again; in a sense it is the core of Amos's message, as, indeed, of all Hebrew prophecy.

How did Jehovah respond to the popular worship? He responded to it by an ascending climax of affliction—by famine, drought, blight, locusts, pestilence, war, earthquake, and something more awful still. That is the connection between what Amos has just said and what he is about to say. "Not justice and kindness, but ritual and ceremony—that

is what *you* practise. Very well ; then I also on my part have given you cleanness of teeth and want of bread in all your places." Clean teeth are teeth that have had nothing to bite, and the allusion is to famine. If you on your part have done that, then I on my part have done this. Here again is the stern doctrine of law, of cause and effect, the answering of *this* to *that* which runs alike throughout the physical and the moral world : to Amos there is but one world, one law, one will, one God. But the fierce discipline of famine was not only, not even chiefly, to punish the people, but rather to stir them to reflection and repentance, and to win them to Himself, though the discipline failed of its purpose—" ye did not return unto Me." Famine was followed by a drought so severe that the people of one city would go fainting and staggering to another city for water—" yet ye did not return unto Me." Drought was followed by a blight which withered the crops, and a plague of deadly locusts which devoured the fruit trees, and this again by pestilence and war, those two dread scourges

which so regularly go together ; but in every case with the result that "ye did not return unto Me."

Thus these calamities, in which terror succeeds terror, are regarded in two aspects : on the one hand they are calls to repentance, on the other they are God's answer to the popular religion. Amos's conception of God forced upon him a moral interpretation of the national calamities. Jehovah was displeased with their ceremonial worship, because it was justice that He loved ; and because it is justice that He loves, everything that He does in history or nature will be done in moral interests. Nature is not God, it is God's, and He wields its forces to further the interests of His kingdom. He is the Creator, the God of hosts, as Amos often calls Him, hosts in the heaven and on the earth, hosts of the rain showers and the locusts, hosts of the Syrians and the Assyrians. Add to Jehovah as Creator the conception of Jehovah as righteous, and nature is seen to be a moral instrument, a force or forces radiant with ethical purpose. It was no

superstition that led Amos to see in the thirsty land and the swarms of locusts the smiting hand of God ; it was his belief in God as the righteous Creator, lifted above the forces which He had called into being, and therefore able to wield those forces as He pleased ; but His pleasure was always regard for ethical interests. It was never exercised in any capricious or arbitrary way, but always, whether obviously or not, through law. The God of order could act in no other way. Those apparent exceptions to the operations of natural law, those inexplicable droughts and blights and famines and pestilences and locusts, were to Amos the highest confirmation of law ; for they proved to a demonstration the omnipotence of moral law, the supremacy of spiritual interests in the economy of the universe, the unswerving regard of God for the moral welfare of men, and His purpose to direct the inexhaustible resources of His world to the upholding of the moral law, and to the betterment of human character.

It is more difficult for the modern man

than it was for Amos to accept this view of the meaning and purpose of calamity. It is more natural for us to regard the giant forces of nature as moving inevitably and inexorably on their way, often dealing death as they go, and without the faintest regard to the moral merits or demerits of those whom they overwhelm : and so with calamity and suffering of every kind. It was our Lord Himself who reminded us that the eighteen who were killed by the fall of a tower in Jerusalem were no worse than the thousands who escaped. The religious temper to which a great disaster seems to point unerringly to special sin on the part of the sufferer or sufferers is rarer in the world than it used to be, and is particularly incompatible with the purely scientific temper. Men are not so ready as they would once have been with edifying explanations of the Tay Bridge disaster, or of the earthquake which all but destroyed San Francisco, or of the colossal tragedy in which the *Titanic* was engulfed in the waters of the Atlantic. Mr. Lecky remarks, in his *History of European Morals*,

that "there arises in the minds of scientific men a conviction, amounting to absolute moral certainty, that the theological habit of interpreting the catastrophes of nature as Divine warnings or punishments or disciplines, is a baseless and pernicious superstition"; and Mr. Edmund Gosse, in *Father and Son*, speaks of his father as retaining "the singular superstition, amazing in a man of scientific knowledge and long human experience, that all pains and ailments were directly sent by the Lord in chastisement for some definite fault, and not in relation to any physical cause."

Certainly we shall never again be able to believe that every blow inflicted by the so-called physical order falls by reason of some moral transgression—the book of Job is the everlasting protest against that belief; but, all the same, to the sensitive heart every disaster speaks an urgent message. We have no right to interpret it as the punishment of others, but we have every right to regard it as a call to ourselves—a call to reflection and repentance.

This, far more than the other, is the point on which Amos's argument, throughout this part of his speech, chiefly fastens. He regards each calamity, as it fell, more as a call than as a chastisement. Its design was to make the people think, to make them come to themselves, like the prodigal son (Luke xv. 17), and so to their God. The recital of each disaster closes with the melancholy refrain, five times told, that the lesson of it had been missed—"yet ye did not return unto Me." Me: behind the calamity which seemed so cruelly inexplicable beat the great heart of God, who was sternly seeking to win His people to Himself. The severity, no less than the goodness of God, should lead men to repentance. Every disaster brings us face to face with that mysterious Force in the universe—call it God or what you will—with which we have all, in some way or other, at some time or other, to reckon, and with which, especially in moments of terror, we should like to be at peace. In that sense calamity is always a call to repentance, a call to face the ultimate things, the ultimate

Person behind all things; and in face of experiences the most tragic, how often may it be said of us, as of Israel, that we did not return unto Him?

But Jehovah loves His people too well to abandon them easily. In love He will lay His heavy hand upon them again and again. He will not give them up, not till the last fearful warning, "Prepare to meet thy God," and perhaps not even then; for this, too, may be, as some suppose, a gracious warning to have all things in readiness against the approaching doom which will not overwhelm those whom it finds prepared. In any case, what is it but Love, working in her own stern way, that sends upon the unhappy people a climax of woes, calling ever fiercer instruments into play, if only she may win them and chastise them into the gracious destiny for which God had chosen them out of all the families of the earth (iii. 2)? "Return to the Lord," says the thirsty land; the very locusts sing, "Return to the Lord." Back to the God whose poor they had crushed and whose true demands they had mocked by

their idle ceremonies which mattered nothing at all, back to Him they are summoned by the brazen skies and the noisome pestilence and the flashing Syrian swords.

Through this fierce and varied discipline Jehovah had been summoning the people to Himself, and they had turned a deaf ear. Now He will roar like a lion before he leaps upon his prey : perhaps that will terrify them, perhaps they will listen to the roll of His thunder that ushers in the storm. For neither the leap nor the storm can now be averted ; on it is coming, and *I will not turn it back. Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* Again the prophet, in that weirdly terrible way of his, holds over them the horrors of a doom he does not name, "Thus will I do unto thee"—not with a backward look at the recital of the blows which had already fallen unheeded, but with a forward glance to a tragedy more awful still. What was it? Perhaps the onslaught of the Assyrians. The sinful state, Amos knew full well, was doomed ; and the Assyrian with his bloody sword would drive home the lesson which the

famine and the drought had failed to teach. Or perhaps, as has been suggested by some modern scholars, the original threat of Amos was so appalling that the copyist shrank from transcribing it, and it has been lost to us for ever. But one thing is certain, that the fate at which even our present text darkly hints, is nothing less than terrible—incomparably more terrible than anything that has gone before. "Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

This God of terrors has to be reckoned with, and He will not be satisfied with their ritual and ceremony—the hymns and the music, the tithes and the sacrifices and the offerings of fat beasts—so long as they refuse to find a place in their social life for justice and mercy and pity. How silly all their worship looks in the light of the magnificent revelation of the creative and ever-moving power of God with which the chapter closes, and how stupendous are the forces He can summon in defence of His insulted majesty! How glorious and terrible is the God whom

they are to prepare to meet !—the God who formeth the mountains and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what his mind is ; that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth : Jehovah, the God of hosts, is His name.

AMOS V.

THE DIVINE DEMAND.

"Let justice roll on like water, and righteousness as a perennial stream" (v. 24).

A SPEAKER like Amos compels a hearing, and he introduces his next message, as he had introduced two previous ones (iii. 1, iv. 1), with his imperious "Listen." The burden of this message is essentially the same as that of the others—the doom of Israel is imminent and irretrievable — but this time he clothes it in the form of a dirge. The measure customarily adopted by Hebrew poetry for the expression of lamentation is a couplet in which a line of three accents is followed by a line of two, and Amos's dirge would run something like this:

"Fállen is the vírgin of Ísrael,
She shall ríse up no móre.
Próstrate she liés on the groúnd,
With nóne to upraíse her."

The Divine Demand

We must again remind ourselves that Amos is in all probability addressing a large crowd of worshippers gathered at some such famous shrine as Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba, to celebrate some festival. They are fresh from their pilgrimage, the holiday mood is upon them, the country is outwardly prosperous, in this prosperity they see the indubitable proofs of Jehovah's favour ; they are gathered to express their homage, and to render Him of their best. But their jubilation is rudely broken by the weird and ominous cadences of Amos's dirge. Judge of their surprise when this unknown man in shepherd's dress stands up before them, with the stern countenance and the strange eyes that seem to look into the far away, and opens his melancholy chant with the word *Fallen*, which would strike a chill to their hearts.

> "Fallen—to rise nevermore—
> Is the virgin of Israel."

To a happy and prosperous people like Israel in the middle of the eighth century B.C. such an announcement must have seemed

nothing short of monstrous; but to Amos, who saw beneath the glittering surface to the inner corruption, it was inevitable. The nation—here compared, as often in the Old Testament, to a virgin—is in his eyes already as good as dead. She may walk yet a little while with her haughty head erect, but Amos sees her already stretched prostrate upon the ground, and the time for lament has come. Therefore "listen to this word which I take up for a dirge over you." Amos is clearly thinking of the doom of war, for he goes on:

"The city that marched forth a thousand,
Shall come back with a hundred;
And the city that marched forth a hundred
Shall come back with but ten."

The nation is already dying in any case of moral decay, but, besides, she will be shattered in pieces by the shock of war.

Yet Amos, like all true preachers, has a tender and pitiful heart. He cannot bear to think that the doom he has just announced is really irretrievable. He knows that repentance can do much; and in the hope

that hearts are not yet hardened beyond the possibility of repentance, he turns to them appealingly with the words, "Seek Me, and ye shall live." So life was still possible for the dying nation, but only on the condition that she should seek God. What does Amos mean by seeking God? That comes out in a later verse of the chapter (v. 14), where, making a very similar promise, he says, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live." The evil which Israel must avoid is chiefly, as we have repeatedly seen, the wanton oppression of the poor; the good which she is urged to follow is the establishing of just relations between the members of society. That is the way of life. But for the people, seeking God meant attending the places of worship. Amos found God in a justly ordered society; the people found Him, or thought they did, in the sanctuaries; but He is not there, says Amos, with almost desperate emphasis—He is not there. "Seek Me, but seek not Bethel," for you will not find Him there. The contrast between the true and the false in religion, between God and

the greatly venerated places of worship, could not be more strikingly suggested than in that cutting antithesis, which shows us how deep was his hostility to them, not to say his hatred. Gilgal (if it was the Gilgal near Shechem), Beersheba, and Bethel were hoary with memories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; but neither patriarchs nor sanctuaries could shield the wicked people from the wrath of God. In one of those word-plays so frequent in Hebrew prophecy, and so impossible to translate, Amos announces the doom of impending national extinction, through exile, in words which have been rendered thus—hardly too strongly—"Gilgal shall come to the gallows, and Bethel shall be the devil's." How appalling must such a threat have sounded in the ears of worshippers who were giving God, as they supposed, even more than He asked for, serving Him better than the law prescribed !

Again the prophet turns to the people with a similar appeal and a similar threat, "Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live ; lest He send upon you the unquenchable, devouring fire."

The Divine Demand

The passion of Amos's soul is for the establishment of social justice; and his denunciations and threats fall upon the heads of those who frustrate that, whether by incidental cruelty or, as here, by deliberate violation of the principles of equity in the courts of justice. The worst offenders were those who poisoned justice at its source, those who by their venal decisions made it a bitter thing for the poor man when it ought to have been sweet, and who laid righteousness prostrate upon the ground when she ought to have been erect and smiling. It is not truth that they and the wealthy litigants care about, it is a legal victory and a financial gain. "Ye trample upon the poor," that is the charge which Amos brings against the upper classes of his day with melancholy reiteration. The great city lords, who owned the land, seem to have imposed heavy burdens of taxation upon the poor countrymen in the form of exactions of wheat; and they succeeded in grinding them down so completely, as Isaiah (v. 8) informs us, that the land that had once been theirs had slipped from their

fingers, and their masters coolly annexed house after house and field after field. But in a world ruled by the God in whom Amos believes, such things cannot go on for ever, so he boldly declares that the spoilers will be spoiled. The day was not far off when they would be dragged by the violent hands of the enemy away from their palatial houses of hewn stone, which had been built and maintained by the proceeds of iniquity, and away from the pleasant vineyards whose wine had proved a curse. Amos's conception of sin and of God rendered such a doom inevitable; and in the Assyrians there was a power capable of effecting it.

Yet Amos hopes against hope that the doom may be turned; and for the third time he delivers his appeal, quivering with earnestness, to "seek good and not evil, that ye may live." "Seek God," he had said before, "and ye shall live": now he says, "Seek good, and ye shall live." What a suggestive collocation! especially when we find the good defined in the next verse as to "establish justice." Goodness has always covered many

kinds of excellence: it includes robust and gentle virtues, active and passive qualities of character. But goodness in Hebrew prophecy has almost always a social colour: in Amos particularly it is the doing of justice in society, the securing of fair play between man and man. No man can live to himself,—we are all members of society,—but the man who would even try to live to himself could not be good, in the Old Testament sense of the term, however many of the passive virtues he might possess. The good man is not merely the man who practises prayer, who avoids intemperance and immorality: he is the man who considers the poor, who does what he can to right the wrongs of society, and to bring in the reign of justice. That is "good": seek that, and ye shall live; ignore that, and there will be chaos and ruin. "Seek God," said the prophet, "and ye shall live"; and if the search for God seem to involve some mystical, remote, perhaps unattainable experience, we shall bring ourselves back again to the solid ground of fact by reminding ourselves that he also said, "Seek good, and ye

shall live." We shall find, not all indeed, but something, of God in the search for a juster social order.

But it must be an honest and an earnest search. For the prophet does not say, "Shun the evil, and perform the good," but "Hate the evil, and love the good." This is a profound and searching word. The social problem will never be satisfactorily solved by mechanism, arrangement, legislation alone, but by the creation of a just and generous temper, by the diffusion of an unselfish and public-spirited character which considers the things of others as well as its own. It may be hopefully faced if men have a passion for justice and a horror of wrong, if they hate the evil and love the good, as those terms are understood by Amos. The root of the social problem, as some one has said, is not defective social arrangement, but sin; and no fundamental improvement can be effected by a change in the environment, but only by a change in the men. The prophets have no specific proposals to make for the reconstruction of society. Their aim

was to reform the men ; this could only be accomplished by means of that worthier view of God and religion which they perpetually strove to enforce ; and the reformed men—the men thus re-formed in God—could be trusted to reform the situation. No worthy or permanent transformation of society was possible till all its members learned to hate the evil and love the good.

But, so deeply is Amos convinced of the depravity of his people, and of the certainty of the judgment which that depravity has rendered necessary, that he cannot bring himself to believe that even repentance can altogether avert it. He expresses himself with an almost painful hesitation in which we can detect plainly enough the struggle of his heart with his conscience — the heart which bleeds for his people, with the conscience which is under no illusions as to the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and which knows that all this bribery and cruelty, this intemperance and immorality, this worship of money and pleasure, this manifold and rampant wrong, deserves God's wrath and

curse. So, half in hope and half in despair, he only permits himself to assure them that if they hate the evil, if they seek and love the good, if they establish once more the justice they had been systematically trampling under foot, *it may be* that God will be gracious, and even then gracious only to the *remnant*: for some terrible judgment is coming—he cannot get away from the thought—worse than the earthquake, the locusts, the drought, the famine—which will sweep most of them away. There *may be* a *remnant* to whom He will be gracious, but it will be as the remnants of the sheep when it has been torn to pieces by the lion (iii. 12). These are the accents of a bleeding, broken heart. Still there is this faint "perhaps." "Seek good and not evil, and *so*"—on these moral terms—"Jehovah will be with you, as ye say." A whole world of dark significance lies in these simple words *as ye say*. They let us see that Amos was addressing a people who were perpetually assuring themselves that Jehovah would be with them, *must* be with them, was with them, because they faithfully

attended the places of worship and paid their dues and more. No! says Amos, a thousand times no! Not on your ceremonial terms, but on His moral terms: that is, if you seek what is good with all your heart, if you carry the spirit of justice into your social and institutional life—*so* and no otherwise will Jehovah be with you, as you say. But after faintly trusting this larger hope, the stern prophet speedily falls back again upon the certainty of doom. Through those deep-set eyes of his he sees it steadily advancing over all the land, over the crowded streets and squares of the city, over the large spaces of the country, over the vineyards where men and maids were wont to make so merry; for, as once the destroying angel had passed through the land of Egypt, leaving death in his trail, "so will I pass through the midst of thee, saith Jehovah."

It is terrible, yet there is something more terrible to follow. "Woe unto you," he breaks out suddenly, "who desire the day of Jehovah." The day of Jehovah was one of the primary articles in the popular creed.

It was the day of Jehovah's triumph ; and, as Jehovah and Israel were supposed to be indissolubly associated, that meant the day of Israel's triumph over all her foes—victory for Israel, judgment for them. Yes, says Amos, judgment indeed, but judgment upon Israel. The day of Jehovah shall break in thunder on your head. The people thought of Him as a national God, bound to defend and preserve them for His own reputation's sake, triumphing if they triumphed, perishing if they perished ; the prophet thought of Him as a moral God, bound only to vindicate the moral order and those who co-operated with it ; so that Israel who defied that order, as Amos sorrowfully complains, was inevitably doomed—doomed by the very God whom she loudly acclaimed as her own. His triumph meant her destruction. That was what would happen in the great day of Jehovah ; yet in their stupidity—blinded as they were by a false conception of religion, the people longed for it. "What good will it do you ?" Amos pointedly asks—"this day of Jehovah. You imagine it will be a

day of light ; and so it will,—a day when His justice will shine clear,—but it will be night for you." His day would be Israel's night, unilluminated save by the gleam of Assyrian swords.

Then he goes on to describe the certainty and the terrors of this day of Jehovah in simple images of surpassing power. He takes the familiar facts of his shepherd experience and works them up to a terrific climax. It will be a day of lions and bears and serpents—a day when Israel would be pursued by the most powerful and ghastly things—pursued and seized and bitten. It will be as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him ; or, escaping from the bear, he reaches the kindly shelter of his house, where, thank God ! at last he is safe, and wearily he leans his hand upon the wall, when, horror ! a serpent bites him. Two wild beasts, the lion and the bear, one on either side, and poor Israel in the midst, ready to be torn in pieces—that will be the day of Jehovah. Or, if by any chance she escapes the wild beasts, the serpent finds her at the

last, *and bites*. There is no ultimate escape. That is Amos's fearful way of suggesting the omnipresence of God, the inexorableness of law, the inevitableness of doom. Woe unto you then who desire the day of Jehovah. What good will the day of Jehovah do you? For it will be darkness and not light, yea, thick darkness, without a glimmer; or if there be a flash, it will only show a serpent on the wall.

Is it any wonder that the people were stung into indignation and fury by so implacable a message? We can imagine them shouting, "It's a lie—a blasphemy and a lie. Look at the sacrifices we are offering to our God—at their number and their quality. Look at the crowds that flock to the sanctuaries—at our fidelity and enthusiasm. Look at the beauty and the splendour of our worship. Watch the noble ritual, and listen to the stately music. And yet you tell us that the God to whom we offer all this costly aud devoted service will destroy us. Who but a traitor, a blasphemer, a madman could even dream of such a thing?" Then Amos replies in words

of amazing audacity : "I hate, I despise your feasts." One wonders that the man who dared to hurl such a challenge should have escaped with his life ; little wonder that men who could speak like that were sometimes persecuted and slain (Matt. v. 12, xxiii. 29–31). In the name of God, the prophet goes on, "I reject your offerings, I care nothing for your fat beasts. Away with your vocal and instrumental music ; I refuse to listen to it. These were not the things that I demanded from you long ago in the wilderness, in those good old days, at the beginning of your national history, to which you are so fond of looking back. That never has been and never will be my demand upon men. Then and now and evermore my demand is this, that justice should roll on like water, and righteousness like a perennial stream." These are immortal words ; they express in imperishable form the essence of religion, the simple demands of God upon men. The justice, the righteousness for which Amos here pleads is, as we have abundantly seen, a social thing : it is tender regard for

the poor, *hatred* of the *evil* conditions that have dwarfed their lives (v. 15); it is the spirit which yearns and works for the removal of those conditions; it is, in a word, respect for personality, fair play as between man and man. Let justice, in that sense, run through society, unimpeded by avarice or selfishness or cruelty, let it roll on without let or hindrance like the waves of the sea; let it roll on unintermittently, all the year round, whatever be the political weather; let it roll on "like a perennial stream," which even in the fiercest heat of summer never dries up. That is the true service of God—that, and not a gorgeous ritualistic display; that, and not meal-offerings and fat beasts. There can be no doubt as to what the answer of Amos would have been to the question, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?"

The answer of the modern prophet is the same. Nothing can be accomplished, says Ruskin, in the *Crown of Wild Olive*, "unless, first of all, both servant and master are resolved that, come what will of it, they will do each other justice. . . . This is the one

thing constantly reiterated by our Master—the order of all others that is given oftenest—'Do justice and judgment.' That's your Bible order; that's the 'Service of God,' not praying nor psalm-singing. . . . He likes honest servants, not beggars. So when a child loves its father very much, and is very happy, it may sing little songs about him; but it doesn't call that serving its father; neither is singing songs about God serving God. . . . And yet we are impudent enough to call our beggings and chantings 'Divine Service'; we say 'Divine Service will be performed' (that's our word—the form of it gone through) 'at eleven o'clock.' Alas! unless we perform Divine Service in every willing act of our lives, we never perform it at all. The one Divine work—the one ordered sacrifice—is to do justice; and it is the last we are ever inclined to do." That is precisely Amos's charge against his own generation; and because they did not understand that religion is not a matter of rites and ceremonies, but must express itself in social life, and that the true service of

A Cry for Justice

God is the service of the needy, he holds before them the sure prospect of political extinction and captivity at the hand of the Assyrians. "I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts."

The truth for which Amos has been pleading with such passion finds a striking echo in these words of one of the greatest of our living English poets :

"When all the choric peal shall end,
That through the fanes hath rung;
When the long lauds no more ascend
From man's adoring tongue;

When whelmed are altar, priest, and creed;
When all the faiths have passed;
Perhaps, from darkening incense freed,
God may emerge at last."

AMOS VI.

KNAVES AND FOOLS.

"Shall horses run upon the rock, or will one plough the sea with oxen? that ye have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (vi. 12).

Amos's message could hardly by the largest charity be described as a gospel of grace. It is the gospel of law—for that, too, is a gospel: to understand and obey the laws by which God governs His world is the way of peace, to ignore or defy them is the way to destruction. True child of the desolate pasture-land as he was, he had learned from its phenomena the relentlessness of law: its occasional grim sights and eerie sounds had invested his imagination with a sort of sombre majesty. In the delineation of terrors he is at home, and the proclamation of Woes is a natural part of his mission. Already he has pronounced a solemn *Woe unto you* upon those

who desire the day of Jehovah (v. 18), possibly also upon those who turned justice to wormwood, and laid righteousness prostrate on the earth (v. 7); now he proclaims it upon those that are at ease—those whose luxury had lulled them into a feeling of false security.

Here, as usually elsewhere, it is the aristocrats whom Amos is addressing, the men of wealth and influence. Their sense of security was not unnatural. The nation was at peace, their own resources were abundant, their God was manifestly favourable, and they were resolved to retain that favour by their elaborate and costly worship, and by their enthusiasm for religion as they understood it. But more than that: the capital cities both of Israel and Judah were deemed, not without historical justification, to be well-nigh impregnable. In point of fact, Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, kept the besieging Assyrian army at bay for three years, before she finally met the doom which Amos had pronounced upon her thirty years or so before; and a century and a half after-

wards it took the Babylonians eighteen months to effect the capture of Jerusalem. Splendidly situated, both those cities were defended by the surrounding mountains; and both imagined themselves to be further secured, beyond the possibility of menace, by the good-will and the protecting power of their God. As the mountains were round about Samaria and Jerusalem, so, they believed, would Jehovah be round about His people. Hence their confidence, which Amos derides, in the mountain of Samaria. Let the worst come to the worst, they had God and the mountains, and that would surely be enough. To this airy confidence, Amos retorts with his crushing "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion, and that are confident in the mountain of Samaria."

As so often happens, with this confidence went conceit. The people styled themselves the foremost nation—a word worth noting, as Amos comes back upon it twice again in the course of his address. Accustomed as we have been by history and experience to empires on a mighty scale, there may seem

something rather ridiculous in this self-designation of Israel, a country at most a hundred and fifty miles in length and a good deal less in breadth. But it has to be remembered that, with the exception of Assyria and Egypt, the peoples bordering upon Israel, and with whom she was most familiar, were small like herself; and, apart from this, as we are told in the book of Kings, and reminded in the last verse of this chapter of Amos, during the reign of the enterprising Jeroboam the Second, the territory of Israel had been restored to its ancient limits, and the glories of the old Davidic empire had been in a measure revived; for the king "restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath in the far north to the sea of the Arabah, that is, the Dead Sea, in the south" (2 Kings xiv. 25). So, if Israel held her head high, it was not without reason.

But Amos, if the words in verse 2 be really his, punctures their pride by a few historical illustrations. Turning their attention to one or two towns in northern Syria,

and then to the Philistine Gath, he asks scornfully, "Are you better than these kingdoms? or are your borders greater than theirs?"[1] Great and strong as they were, they had fallen; and what was Israel, that she should be able to offer an effective resistance? Was she greater or stronger than they were? There was something as ludicrous to the clear-eyed Amos as to us in Israel's claim to be the premier nation, especially when such an ambitious people as Assyria was beginning to stir, which possessed both the power and the will to lay all the little western nations in the dust.

So we are to picture these leaders of the national life as men whose heads were swollen with a ridiculous sense of their nation's place in the world, men unable to measure the political forces or estimate the political probabilities of the day, and foolishly confident of their own impregnability, whatever might betide; bringing on—like the fools they were—by their wanton and supercilious

[1] A very simple and apparently necessary change in the text yields this meaning.

conduct, the evil day which they imagined they had put far away from them. But that general picture is more sharply defined. In one of the most graphic passages in the Old Testament, Amos takes us into one of these aristocratic mansions, and lets us see something of the life led by these prominent and fashionable leaders. Their furniture is of the costliest. The couches upon which they loll —how the simple shepherd would despise the very sight of them!—are inlaid with ivory brought from distant lands. They are not only indolent and profligate, they are extravagant gluttons; they eat the lambs out of the flock. Here perhaps we can detect a note of sorrow as well as of anger; it is a shepherd who is speaking, vexed to think that his little lambs should be destined to come upon the tables of the sort of men he denounces. They eat the calves out of the midst of the stalls. They are topers as well. Not content with cups, they drink wine out of huge bowls. But the æsthetic side of life was not forgotten. Their banquets, at which wine flowed so freely and the dainties were so

toothsome, were enlivened by music, vocal and instrumental: idle songs were sung to a strumming accompaniment. These revellers, too, believed in good perfumery: they anointed themselves with oil of the very choicest kind—"the first of the oils"—a scornful allusion to the nation's description of itself as the first of the nations (vi. 1). The "premier" oil for the leaders of the "premier" nation—how fitting! But the most damning charge of all Amos reserves to the last: "they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph," or more literally, they are not sick for the wound of Joseph. The people, called here by the name of their great ancestor Joseph, are broken—the whole book of Amos makes that plain enough—broken morally and spiritually, broken largely by the sort of men whose manner of life he has just been describing, and soon to be broken even physically and politically by the deadly onslaught of the Assyrians; but these indolent, dissolute political leaders care nothing about it. The test of a true statesman is that he is grieved, sick, when the

people are broken—as, for example, by social injustice. But the leaders and statesmen of those days did not care.

Therefore, says Amos: those who have breathed the atmosphere of Amos learn to tremble when he utters his "therefore," for they know that something terrible is coming. "Therefore they shall go captive with the first that go captive." Here again there is a bitter ironical allusion to their conceited designation of Israel as the foremost nation, and to their effeminate indulgence in the choicest perfumes. So be it, says the prophet, in his grim way: foremost in empire, foremost in foppery, foremost therefore in destruction. Then, when they are marched off in dismal procession to the miseries of exile, "the riot of the revellers shall depart," says Amos in the alliterative way of Hebrew prophecy; and, when the land has been swept clear of them, the silence would fall like music on the prophet's indignant heart.

Such a civilization as Amos has just so vividly described could only end in one way;

and he represents Jehovah as solemnly swearing by Himself—He can swear by none greater—that He will deliver up the wicked city (Amos is thinking, no doubt, chiefly of the capital), and all that is in it, to the ravages of the invader. The mention of so solemn an oath always shows that the soul of the prophet is very deeply moved. Once before we met a similar oath,—when Amos threatened the cruel women of Samaria for crushing the poor in order to supply themselves with money for strong drink (iv. 2). Nothing rouses Amos's wrath like that; and we may be sure that his soul is at white heat here, as, with equal solemnity, he announces the doom of the city.

We could infer without difficulty from all that has gone before, and especially from his picture of the gluttonous, drunken, luxurious, noisy nobles, the reasons for that doom; but he happens to express them here in a terse and telling phrase, which is highly significant for his outlook upon society. "I detest the pride of Jacob—that is, the proud temper of the people, and the things in which they

showed it, ostentatious wealth, luxury, houses— and *I hate his palaces*." Thus saith Jehovah, and thus saith also His prophet. He hates the palaces, with their gorgeous furnishings and their pampered inhabitants. But this must be very carefully noted—otherwise the gravest injustice is done to Amos, and his message is misrepresented—that his hatred of the palaces and his scorn of the nobles are deeper than the mere disgust of a simple peasant at the luxurious refinement of the city. The pomp of the great city houses is detestable, not only because it is pomp, but more because it has cost too dear : it has cost the happiness of the poor and the character of the rich. They have been built upon cruelty, extortion, injustice (iii. 10)—that is why Amos hates them, and that is the key to his message : passion for justice burns within his soul, and hurls him against the serried ranks of wealth and lust. Hate the evil and love the good ; let justice roll on like a river. We must not then glibly dispose of Amos's criticism of the social situation in his day, by regarding it as the criticism of

an unsympathetic and rustic mind, that found its ideal in the simple desert tent, and had no appreciation whatever of cities and the civilization which they imply. We are safe in saying that Amos would have given short shrift to the silken couches inlaid with ivory: the shepherd, happy in his tent, would have had little but contempt for those who indulged in the luxury of winter and summer houses (iii. 15). But his estimate is not to be so easily disposed of, for it is a moral estimate—the estimate of a man to whom righteousness was the supreme thing in the universe. His message is by no manner of means "Down with the aristocracy." It is "Return unto God" (iv. 6), "Seek good and not evil" (v. 14), "Let righteousness roll like a perennial stream" (v. 24). His root objection to the wealthy men of his time is not that they have money, but that they "do not know to do the thing that is straight" (iii. 10). There is much in Amos that a superficial criticism might interpret as a polemic against culture itself, as if the city were necessarily a weltering abomination, in

which the poor were crushed into silence by the heel of wealth—

"City of festering streets by Misery trod,
Where half-fed, half-clad children swarm unshod,
Whilst thou dost rear thy splendid fane to God,"

and as if the ideal were to be found in the country, where life is simple and little exposed to the temptations of avarice or display. But it were unjust to Amos to regard him so: his message is primarily a religious one, and only inferentially social. Hate the evil and love the good—that is a motto as applicable to the city as the country, and as capable of realization. Amos would probably never have cared as much for the palaces, or felt so completely at home in them, as Isaiah: he had not the vision of the transfigured City which haunted the imagination of that great prophet (cf. Isa. i. 26). But neither would he have said, in his own name and in God's, "I hate his palaces," had these palaces been inhabited by men who hated the evil and loved the good, who considered the poor and sought to establish

justice in the gates. Even in the city, "even in a palace, life may be led well."

But the cities and palaces of Amos's time, being what they were, must fall; and, in one of his very weirdest passages, he pictures a scene in the beleaguered city, after destitution has become acute and pestilence has begun to rage. Most of those who do not perish by the sword will die of the plague. The fine houses will be full of dead men; one is pictured as crouching silently in the corner of some desolate, plague-stricken mansion. A friend comes to carry out the bones of the dead for burial: he asks the cowering survivor if he is alone, or if there is any one alive beside him, and he hurriedly replies, "No! Hush! We must not make mention of the name of Jehovah." It is Jehovah who has brought this terrible thing upon them,—for "shall evil happen in a city, and Jehovah not have done it?" (iii. 6),—and the very mention of His name may bring Him upon the scene to inflict upon them some evil more terrible still: so silence is the only wisdom. It is very gruesome—this con-

versation in one of the stately houses of the doomed city, with the dead and dying all about, and the stench of pestilence in the air. But this, Amos means, is what sin brings a nation to; and the destruction will be hideously complete. The great palatial houses will be smashed into fragments, and the little houses into smithereens—by the enemy, no doubt, but with the consent, and at the command, of God Almighty.

As Amos contemplates the injustice that is rampant in society, he cannot find words to express his amazement. "Shall horses run upon the rock," he asks, "or will one plough the sea with oxen,[1] that ye have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood?" For insight and force there is nothing to surpass this in the whole of Amos: it is the tersest and finest expression of his faith in the inexorableness of physical and moral law. Who but a fool, he means, would think of driving horses over jagged crags?—though not correct as a

[1] There is very little doubt that this is the correct translation of this clause.

translation, it would be true to Amos's meaning to paraphrase, "Who would think of attempting to drive horses up a cliff?" Who but a madman would dream of ploughing the sea with oxen? The oxen and the fool who drove them would be drowned. The end of all such attempts would be futility, ruin, and death. Everybody knows it is madness to attempt to violate the physical order: no one could be found so imbecile as to seek to oppose it in either of the ways suggested by these illustrations. Well, then, says Amos, there is a moral as surely as there is a physical order: how can men be such fools as not to see that the violation of the one carries penalties as terrible as the violation of the other? Were they madmen, he means, that they had poisoned justice at its source, and let a foul stream of wrong run through society? God is everywhere, law is everywhere, and neither can be successfully defied: the man or class or nation that attempts to defy Almighty God and His laws will sooner or later be broken in pieces and ground to powder. They had turned

the world upside down, God would have to turn it downside up and crush them in the process. The knave is always a fool. The moral order would be vindicated, Amos assures them, when their houses were shivered into atoms, and they themselves were buried beneath the ruins.

The closing words of this speech of Amos give us another glimpse of that incurable national conceit which he had satirized so scathingly at the beginning of his address. They were jubilant over the recovery of two towns east of the Jordan, Lo-debar and Karnaim, which had apparently been held by the Syrians. Amos indulges here in the same sort of grim word-play as he had already used in denouncing Bethel and Gilgal (v. 5). Lo-debar means in Hebrew *no-thing*, and Karnaim means *horns*, which to the Hebrews were the symbol of strength. So what Amos means is something like this: "You have taken Lo-debar, have you? Good. You will find that the town will not belie its name, it will prove to be a veritable No-thing; your victory is a futile, worthless

thing. You have taken Karnaim by your own strength, have you? You, who ought to be singing after a victory, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory,' have now succeeded in pushing God completely out of your lives, despite the great parade of your public worship, and have got the length of attributing your victories to yourselves. You have *horns*, have you? Well, do you think they will enable you to butt off the onset of the Assyrian army?"—that army which Isaiah described in these immortal words (v. 26–29):

"See! hastily, swiftly they come,
None weary, none stumbling among them.
The band of their loins never loosed,
The thong of their shoes never torn.

Their arrows are sharpened,
Their bows are all bent.
The hoofs of their horses are counted as flint,
And their wheels as the whirlwind.

Their roar is like that of the lioness,
And like the young lions they roar,
Thundering, seizing the prey,
And bearing it off to a place of security."

What folly to think that poor little Israel, for all her boasted strength, could face so terrible a foe! And that foe was assuredly coming. Nay, it was Israel's own God that was leading him on: "For, behold, I am about to raise up against you, O house of Israel, a nation, which shall crush you from the one end of the land to the other!"

And let it never be forgotten, in reading Amos, that his gloomy threats were fulfilled. There is both Biblical and Assyrian evidence for that. The Hebrew historian tells us that "the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6). And in a few simple words, charged with terrible content, Sargon, the Assyrian king who captured Samaria, thus describes his victory: "Samaria I besieged, I captured: 27,290 of her inhabitants I carried away; fifty chariots I

collected from their midst. My viceroy I placed over them, and imposed the tribute of the former king upon them." All this, which happened in 721 B.C., within thirty years or so after Amos had foretold it, surely proves that he was, as he claimed to be, one of the servants to whom the Lord had revealed His secret (iii. 7).

AMOS VII.

THE CLASH OF PROPHET AND PRIEST.

"Amaziah the priest of Bethel said to Amos, Thou visionary! go, flee thou away into the land of Judah: eat thy bread there, and play the prophet there" (vii. 12).

Amos now comes before us in a somewhat new capacity. Hitherto we have known him as a prophet, pleading for God with men, speaking home to the popular conscience, challenging the religious and social life of his contemporaries, proclaiming the eternal laws of God and the doom of impenitent Israel: now he appears as a seer, a man of visions as well as of words. That Amos was a man of vision in the broadest sense of the word must already be abundantly clear: never was insight profounder than his into the moral constitution of the world, or into the sweep, the majesty, the inexorableness of law. But the seer, in the older and

narrower sense, was a man who had ecstatic experiences, in which special knowledge came to him or significant visions were borne in upon his soul; and in this sense, too, Amos was a seer. The vision was usually started by some familiar experience,—in Amos's case it was a plague of locusts, a fierce drought, a builder beside a wall, a basket of fruit,—but upon these simple experiences there falls that light that never was on sea or land. They become the symbols of another order, incarnate prophecies of something yet to be. The supersensible world, or it may be the future, lets itself down into the present, and shines through them before the rapt eyes of the seer.

Amos, as we know, was haunted by the idea of the destruction of Israel; and everywhere he cast his eyes, he found corroboration of his foreboding. He saw through ordinary things to that darker thing which they portended. There had been a plague of locusts, and they had come at a peculiarly inopportune time. The early spring herbage had just been cut and monopolized, as was

apparently the custom, by the king for his cavalry. For the people, everything depended upon the second grass : and then, just at the critical moment, the deadly locusts appeared. All this comes to Amos in his vision : he sees them very plainly, as he had already seen them in actual experience, devouring the fig and the olive trees (iv. 9) ; he watches them with staring, sorrowful eyes —note the twice repeated "behold!"—as he thinks of the havoc they will work, and of the poor man whom they will ruin ; and he sees through the locusts to the terrible God behind and beyond them, who can bring some yet more awful thing to pass—who can, and who will, if Israel does not repent. He shudders, as he looks ; and he prays, "O Lord Jehovah, forgive, I beseech Thee."

So stern is the general bearing of Amos that we are sometimes tempted to think he spoke his message out of an unsympathetic, unrelenting heart. But this is very far from being so. Prophet of indignation as he is, his heart is full of pity, and he earnestly pleads for his sinful, deluded people. It is

not often that we get a glimpse of the prophets at prayer; we see them, for the most part, only as they face the people with the word they must deliver; but their public work rested upon communion with God. They had pled with God for the people, before they ventured to plead with the people for God. They were men of intrepidity and power, because they were, first and foremost, men of prayer. So Amos prays—briefly indeed (most Bible prayers are brief) but with passionate tenderness: "O Lord, forgive, I beseech Thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small." The people thought they were anything but small; they had just been boasting of the "horns" they had taken to themselves by their own strength (vi. 13). But Amos knows how pitifully resourceless they are in reality, and how little they can stand up to God Almighty and the terrors He can bring upon them. Amos is a *seer*: he sees in the locusts the symbol of impending calamity, and he prays that God in His grace may prevent it. His prayer is heard. "Jehovah repented concerning this,

and said, 'It shall not be.'" This vision reveals the conflict in Amos's own soul between his sense of doom deserved and the love he bore his people.

That is his first vision, and the second is like unto it, only more terrible. This time it is a drought. The blazing sun has dried up the springs and fountains which rise from "the great deep," the underground ocean on which the Hebrews imagined the earth to rest. The very deep itself seemed dry, and even the land was about to wither and vanish before those cruel, scorching rays. This vision of the drought, like that of the locusts, rests on an actual experience (iv. 7). God has forgiven the people once, and they are still impenitent. But the prophet loves them too well to give them up; so again he prays, "O Lord Jehovah, cease, I beseech Thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small." It is sadly significant that this time he does not pray for their forgiveness. Neither the severity of God in sending the calamities, nor His goodness in withdrawing them, had led the people to repentance. Both calls

were alike unheeded. Such a hardhearted, incorrigible people would seem to be beyond the reach of forgiveness ; so the prophet only asks the Lord to cease. This time, too, the prayer is heard. "Jehovah repented concerning this. This also shall not be, saith Jehovah." This *also* — with an ominous reference back to His previous forgiveness, which had produced no effect.

The third vision rose out of a very ordinary experience, seemingly altogether devoid of the tragic suggestiveness of the two that had preceded ; but the sombre imagination of Amos, playing upon it, invests it with dark and deadly significance. He is the man of one idea—the doom of Israel—which stares at him from every object he looks at, however innocent. This time it was a builder standing beside a wall, with a plumb-line in his hand. Amos watches the man with curious interest, and with a foreboding at his heart. What is he going to do ? He is going to test the straightness of the wall by dropping the plumb alongside it. The plumb will fall straight ; the inexorable

law of gravitation will guarantee that. But what of the wall? If it does not prove straight when tried by that infallible test, it must be torn down; for there can be no place in the world of sensible men, still less in God's world, for crooked walls. And as he watches with those sadly earnest eyes of his, he begins to see another wall being subjected to the same inexorable test. Jehovah is standing beside the wall that careless Israel has been building, and has dropped His plumb beside it, to see whether it is straight or not. If not, He will tear it down—the whole fabric of their political and religious life. He is not a relentless God. He does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent, and live. But He has already given the nation two chances, and they have been spurned. So the great Master-builder, who can tolerate no crooked or shoddy work, resolves that He "will not pass by them any more"; and lest there should be any doubt as to what this vague threat means, Amos explains it in language of startling vividness: "The high places of Isaac shall be desolate,

and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste ; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." It often helps us to understand the vigour and intrepidity of a prophet's message, if we attempt to translate it into its modern equivalent ; and this word is as if a preacher were to say to-day : "Your ancient cathedrals and your beautiful churches—Canterbury, York, Westminster, St. Paul's, and a hundred others—will be laid in ruins, and the dynasty of King George will perish by the sword."

It is easy to imagine the indignation which this threat of Amos, uttered with almost inconceivable daring, would elicit from the worshippers. Consider the scene. Crowds of enthusiastic worshippers are gathered at Bethel, the principal sanctuary in the kingdom, and particularly associated with royalty, described later as "the king's sanctuary, and the royal temple." Suddenly there comes upon the scene a figure, unauthorized and unannounced, clad in the simple garb of a shepherd, and looking almost as if he belonged to some other world. His appearance

at once arrests. His eyes are fixed upon the visions that stand before his soul, and he begins to relate them in melancholy chant-like tones, till in the end he flashes forth, in words of unambiguous meaning, his dreadful certainty of the impending ruin of his country; and all in the name of the God whom they were at that very season gathered to worship. Such a speech ran right in the teeth of the most cherished convictions of his hearers. They were zealous worshippers of Jehovah: why should He destroy them and demolish their sanctuaries? They were enjoying abundant prosperity, itself the proof and symbol of Jehovah's favour: why should He annihilate it? Amos's speech would convict him at once of blasphemy and high treason: it was a dishonour to God and a menace to the reigning house; and nothing was more natural than that at this point the high priest should intervene.

This man, Amaziah by name, was the leading ecclesiastic of his day, a sort of Archbishop of Canterbury, if we may permit ourselves a modern comparison: we have to

remember this in order to grasp the real significance of the conflict between these two men. Amaziah, as responsible for the worship in the royal sanctuary, would be a court official, and he could not allow Amos's allusion to the fate of the reigning house to go unchallenged. Accordingly he at once takes steps to inform the king that there is a conspiracy on foot, with Amos for its ringleader. This, of course, was anything but the truth, and Amaziah's message to Jeroboam—"Amos hath conspired against thee"—seems a deliberate distortion of Amos's words. But we must not be too severe upon Amaziah. If there were any in Amos's audience disaffected towards the government, his concluding words, "I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword," may well have stirred within them thoughts of conspiracy. Besides, there had been enough interference of prophets with politics in previous Hebrew history to justify Amaziah in his interpretation of Amos's threat. Elijah, and still more Elisha, had directly contributed to the downfall of the

dynasty whose best-known members are Ahab and Jezebel. Therefore Amaziah, as ecclesiastical guardian of the royal interests, was thoroughly justified in dispatching his message to the king: "the land," as he said, "was not able to bear all his words"—so unpatriotic, so dangerous, so monstrous were they. "For this is what Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,'"—he had not quite said that,—"'and Israel shall assuredly be led away into exile from his own land.'"

Then he turns to Amos with the stinging words, "Thou visionary! be off, flee thou away to the land of Judah, eat thy bread there and play the prophet there, but don't prophesy here at Bethel; for this is the king's sanctuary and the royal temple." Amos knew that very well: that was precisely why he had chosen Bethel of all places in the kingdom for the delivery of his message. The crowds were there upon whom he was anxious to drive that message home: above all, the leaders of society and of the Church would be there, possibly the

king himself, certainly the archbishop and some court officials, who would see that the king was speedily informed. This is the most effective commentary on the lion-like courage of the man. But Amaziah treats him with contempt. "Visionary," he calls him, with reference, no doubt, to the visions he has just declared, "you with your staring eyes, we refuse to have our happy festival disturbed by eccentric and dangerous people like you. This is Israel, and you have no right here at our festival at all. Be off to Judah, where you came from. Your friends there will be only too glad to hear your dark and bitter words about Israel; they will pay you well for declaring that the throne of Israel will be drenched in blood, and our people swept into exile. But you are never again to come to Israel with messages of that kind,—least of all here, to Bethel: for this is the king's own sanctuary. Begone!" The priest's suggestion that Amos should "eat bread" in Judah is a base insinuation that he was paid, as in some form or other the ordinary prophet seems to have been, for

the word he had uttered. But the great prophets were not paid, except with indifference and scorn, with persecution and sometimes with death. There is something infinitely pathetic in this clash of prophet and priest. The bravest and truest voice in Israel had spoken, and the priest attempted to stifle it. He said to the prophet, "Prophesy not" (cf. ii. 12). The priest is bound by his political connections: the prophet is free, bound by nothing but his obligation to declare the truth. Amaziah, his eyes blinded by the glitter of his rites and ceremonies, does not know a true prophet when he sees him; he cannot distinguish between Amos and a common agitator. How small the priest, how great the prophet! One of the greatest men in history stands before the priest, and the priest says to him, Begone.

Then Amos rises up like a giant, and says to Amaziah, "No prophet I, nor son of prophet I, but a shepherd, and a dresser of sycomore trees; and Jehovah took me from behind the flock and said, 'Go and prophesy to My people Israel.'" No priest can over-

awe this man. In all his native simplicity he faces the greatest Churchman of his day, without flinching and without fear. God is for him, and he cares not though priests and princes and people be against him. He repudiates with dignity the insinuation that he is a professional prophet, preaching as he is paid and expected to preach. Of course he is a prophet, and he is not ashamed to call himself a prophet—in the deeper sense of the word. The voice of the Lord had spoken to his inmost soul, and said, "Go and prophesy"; he is one of those who stand within the secret of the Lord, who does nothing in history without revealing that secret to His servants the prophets (iii. 7). But when he affirms that he is no "prophet's son," he is simply, in Hebrew way, disclaiming all connection with the professionals. He is not bound by their traditions or conventions or methods or aims. He is not their man, speaking as the "college" or guild prescribes; he is his own man and God's man. He preaches because he must. He is a prophet because he cannot help it.

He is borne on by an irresistible impulse to utter the word which, for all he knows, may cost him his life. But when the lion roars, who can suppress his fear? and when the Lord speaks, who can help prophesying? (iii. 8). That is his defence. He has received his commission from God Almighty, he has been "licensed" by none other than the Lord Himself to preach his terrible gospel.

He does not tell us as much as we should like to know as to how the call came to him. On the solitudes of Tekoa he had long been brooding over the wickedness and folly of the people, till one day a voice—it was the voice of God—whispered to his heart that he was the man whom God needed and must send to warn them of the coming disaster, which could only be turned by repentance and obedience and regard for the down-trodden. Instantly the shepherd was transformed into a prophet: how, we shall never completely know. In those great moments of the soul there must always be a mystery, which we cannot altogether penetrate: the

veil is lifted, so far as it is lifted at all, in the simple words, "Jehovah took me from behind the flock, and said, Go and prophesy." But such an experience, mysterious though it be, is to the man who passes through it the most real thing in all the world. Amos would as soon have dreamt of doubting his own existence as of doubting his call. The Lord had said, Go, and he went, because he had heard Him and was possessed by Him, and could not help himself.

Amos and Amaziah, as they face each other, incarnate the everlasting opposition between the two great types of religion—the prophetic and the priestly. Amaziah in his resplendent sacerdotal robes, Amos in his simple shepherd dress: Amaziah, the representative and the exponent of an ancient tradition; Amos, respecting the past (ii. 9, 10), but conscious of being the servant of a *living* God, whose voice spoke as plainly in the present as ever it did in the past: Amaziah, bound by churchly conventions, by priestly traditions and usages, by political affiliations, as a servant of the king; Amos, standing

apart, free from the dictation and the obligations of a professional order, ready to speak his mighty word untrammelled, as and when the Spirit moved him : Amaziah the servant of the government, Amos the servant of God and of the Truth : Amaziah the guardian of rites and ceremonies, the champion of the external in religion ; Amos the apostle of a religion whose most essential demand was that justice should run through society like a river. It is, in its extreme form, the contrast between a religion of externals and a religion of the heart, between ceremony and morality, between display and reality, between tradition and progress, between bondage and liberty, between the God who in ancient times has expressed Himself once for all, and the living God of To-day and To-morrow : —that is the conflict incarnate in the persons of Amos and Amaziah. Doubtless the contrast can be drawn too sharply : there are men—even in the Bible—who have affiliations with both types. But it is a very real contrast, it has run through the whole history of religion, and, as we look at the opposing

types, and consider what is meant by pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father, we know to whom our sympathies run out. We cannot forget that Jesus of Nazareth was a *prophet* mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how it was the chief *priests* who delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified (Luke xxiv. 19, 20).

Conscious, then, of being directly commissioned by God Almighty, and refusing to be browbeaten by the courtier priest, he repeats in his ears, in grave and solemn words and with the utmost deliberation, his former announcement of Israel's fate, this time, however, pointing the terrors of his threat by a personal allusion to the fate of Amaziah himself, his wife, his sons, and his daughters. There is a fine contrast here between what Amaziah says to Amos and what God has said to him : for the former, the prophet cares nothing at all. "*You* say, 'Don't prophesy any more against Israel' : but this is what *Jehovah* says : 'The enemy will come and drag your wife away to dishonour, and

they will dip their swords in the blood of your children : they will seize your land and apportion it as they please : and you—yes, you shall die in the unclean land of Assyria ; and—however little you may think it, however much you may deny it—Israel shall assuredly be swept into exile far from her own land.' "

Could there be greater courage than this ? Such a speech was bound to render the speaker not only unpopular, but odious. He must have incurred by it the hostility of the king, the priests, and the people—the king whose dynasty he had said would go down in blood, the priests whose sanctuaries he had doomed to destruction, the people for whom he had prophesied exile. God was his friend, but he cannot have had many human friends after an utterance like that ; and he left the festival at Bethel, at once vanquished and victor.

AMOS VIII.

UNSLAKED THIRST.

"They shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, but they shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst" (viii. 12, 13).

This chapter, like the last, brings Amos before us in a double capacity—as seer and as prophet. To the visions we have already considered, the locusts, the drought, the man beside a wall with a plumb in his hand, is now added a fourth—a basket of summer fruit. The year is further advanced than in the first vision. There it was the spring time, when the locusts appeared to devour the pasture-land: now it is autumn. The summer has come and ripened the fruits, and there, before the eyes of Amos, lies a basket full of them. But in his torn heart it wakes no gracious thoughts. He is the man of one idea—the doom of Israel—and

across the autumn landscape he sees destruction written in letters of flaming fire. Everything suggests the impending doom, even this little innocent basket of fruit. It, too, like the man testing the wall with the plumb, is sadly eloquent of the fate of Israel, a vivid symbol of the end. It tells him that the summer is past and the autumn is come, and the year will soon be over. So Israel's autumn, too, has come; she is older and nearer the end than she knows. The fruit is ripe: so is Israel—ripe for destruction. The very name of this summer fruit is full of boding to the sharp ears of Amos, ever ready to detect in words and things a prophecy of Israel's doom. It is difficult to reproduce the word-play in English; the Hebrew word for late summer or *autumn fruit* has much the same sound as the word for *end*. But if, with our American friends, we say *fall* for *autumn*, we catch something of Amos's point. "Fall-fruit," he repeated to himself, as he looked at the basket. Yes, he soliloquised; well named indeed, for the *fall* has come upon my people Israel.

Name and thing were alike suggestive. The harvest was past, the summer was ended, and they were not saved : nay, not only not saved —they were on the brink of destruction. "The end is come : I have mercifully spared them already, but I will not pass by them any more." And Amos shudders as he sees with his too vivid imagination that day of wrath, that dreadful day, when the happy chorus of praise that rose from the women of the temple choir would be turned into shrieks and howls of misery ; while the dead, the victims of war and pestilence, would be lying around thick upon the ground, unhonoured, unburied, fit emblems of their nation, fallen to rise no more.

The seer now turns prophet, and commands his audience, as was his habit (iii. 1, iv. 1, v. 1), with an imperious "listen." Here, as everywhere his interest is in the downtrodden, and fierce words are hurled at those who trample upon the needy and crush the poor. This time we have the good fortune to be shown who the oppressors are and how they do it. They are the wealthy corn

merchants, and they do it by the most disgraceful swindling. But these swindlers are outwardly respectable people, and appear even to make a profession of religion. They have, or at least pretend to have, some regard for the day of worship, the sabbath and the new moon. Their shops are closed on those days, though for all we know this may be only out of deference to a long established tradition or to a strong public opinion : for it is very plain that they have no real love for the Sabbath, and that it has never entered into their minds to use the opportunities it brings as a means of strengthening themselves in their most holy faith, of advancing their knowledge of the things that concern their peace, or of preparing to meet their God. The Sabbath to them was not a joy but a burden, the tedium of which they could hardly disguise. It was an irksome and intolerable interruption to the great work of their lives, which was to make as much money as possible, by fair means or foul —preferably by foul, as that way was speediest. When the holy days came round,

they fretted their hearts away and pined for the coming of the new day, when they might open their shops and start their low cheating once more. "Oh! when," they wearily say, "will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may open our sacks and expose our wheat for sale?" Commerce is necessary, but this is commercialism, the small, mean trading spirit, which cares nothing for religion, nothing for art or music, nothing for anything but the endless making of money, and regards every hour as lost that is not devoted to that end. If that were all, it would be contemptible enough, but this passion for money was so keen that it refused to be satisfied in honest ways. Only the unscrupulous could hope to be successful; the honest policy was too slow. Character might be lost, but what of that? What was character to reputation? above all, what was character to money? So they adopted every fraudulent device they could think of for swindling their poor customers out of their dues: they used false balances, they gave short weight,

they charged exorbitant prices. And the crowning treachery was this, that the wheat which they disposed of so dishonestly was of the poorest quality, practically worthless. What had been sifted out and would ordinarily be thrown away, they sold, or mixed in large quantities with the wheat proper: so that their swindling affected not only the pockets, but the health and vigour of the people.

It is very significant that the men who do these wicked things sit loose to the obligations of the Sabbath day. Religion is a restraining as well as an inspiring force. Their barefaced disregard of the decencies of trade is largely the result of their indifference to religion; having no fear of God, they have no regard for man. The Sabbath-hating and the swindling go well together. It is no accident that those who do not love the Sabbath cheat on Monday: they rob God and their own souls one day, and their neighbour the next. To be irreligious is to be anti-social; to be religious, in the sense demanded by Hebrew prophecy, is to be social; and conversely, in order to be social,

to care for the welfare of others as deeply as for one's own, it is necessary to be religious. Men cannot with any propriety call themselves brothers until they acknowledge a common Father. "Return unto *Me*" (iv. 6) —that is the fundamental gospel of Amos, from which his social gospel flows.

But those commercial magnates who hated the Sabbath day and industriously defied the fundamental principles of business morality, had no intention of giving either God or His poor their rightful place. With their false balances and short weights and high prices and trashy goods, they were not a whit better than common criminals. For the trust that raises prices to artificial levels, or the man that asks a price for which he has not given the equivalent in weight and quality, is appropriating money which is not his own,—in plain words, is a thief; and the man who sells adulterated food is, to all intents, a murderer; if he has not actually taken life, he has at least imperilled it, by lowering the health and reducing the vitality of the consumer. These men forget, as a financier has

recently said, that a nation "travels on its morality." If it has no morality, it stands still and rots, or it travels towards the Abyss.

Now the God whom Amos worships cannot look unmoved upon such cynical commercial indecency, such cold-blooded defiance of the laws that ought to regulate trade and commerce. "Surely," He swears with a solemn oath, "I will never, never forget any of the things that they have done." He pronounces upon the country woe after woe, almost more terrible, if possible, than anything that has gone before—and all because of the commercial dishonesty by which it is cursed. Surely no one who knows the religion of the prophets could accuse them of being otherworldly, in any depreciatory sense of that term. Otherworldly they were, if you like, in the sense that they were the implacable foes of the existing materialistic order of society, which ordained that

> "They should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can";

and in the sense that they were the unwearying champions of that diviner order, according to which men would do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with their God. Otherworldly they were, in the sense that they sought to permeate human society with the principles of that heavenly order which we daily pray may be realized within it—"as in heaven, so on earth." But not with the remotest justification could it be said that they were otherworldly in the sense that their religion exhausted itself in mystic yearnings for some world beyond, or that they cared nothing for the world that now is, with its perplexing social and political, national and international, problems, but set their hopes and their affections in the life beyond the grave. For this world they cared everything, upon this world they believed that the ideal society would, in God's good time, emerge. That is why they speak and work with such fierce, unwearying energy for the purification of the national life. Those who do not understand what they were aiming at have accused them of being unpractical dreamers,

who show no power to translate their general demands into concrete formulæ or specific legislation. But, in truth, no reformers were ever more practical than they. They enacted no laws, but they went deeper than all legislation, to the human heart, and sought to effect their reformation there. They said, "Hate the evil, and love the good." Take care of the heart and the laws will take care of themselves; for the laws will then be made by men who love one another, and society will be broad-based upon the royal law of love. Legislation will still be necessary; but it is no part of the prophet's business to legislate. Amos offered no proposals for the stricter regulation of the corn market, suggested no programme for the abolition of swindling or the protection of the poor: he sought to smite the conscience, for even the heathen conscience, on his view, well knew the difference between right and wrong.

But meantime the point is that Amos is no mystic, indifferent to the life about him. As we saw, he was thoroughly familiar with

the international situation : we now see that he is equally familiar with the transactions of the markets and the shady practices of the merchant princes. He addresses himself fearlessly to the corn-dealers, as he had addressed himself to the high priest and the worshippers at Bethel, proclaiming his old gospel, which can never be out of date, that social injustice is the way to national ruin. "Shall not the land tremble for this?" The very earth will reel in response to the unblushing iniquity that is done upon it. The prophet is here thinking of an earthquake—again no empty threat, for in his time there had been one so destructive as to remain vivid in the national memory for centuries—which would cause the land to rise and fall, and cover it with devastation, and plunge the people into universal mourning. This calamity would be followed by another—the darkening of the earth in broad noonday. This threat rests also, no doubt, upon an actual experience of an eclipse of the sun, a phenomenon which smote the ancient heart with superstitious terror. Amos

describes with great power the effects of this supernatural darkness. Feasts would be turned into mourning, songs into lamentation, and everywhere there would be sorrow as bitter as for the loss of an only child.

But the resources of the God of hosts are infinite, and His power to punish is not yet exhausted. There next falls upon the unhappy land a drought so fierce that even the young men and the comely maidens faint for very thirst; and if they faint, in the strength and vigour of their youth, what will become of the weak—the very young and the very old? One cannot bear to think of the horrors of such a day.

But a more terrible thing is still to happen. Smitten thus by blow upon blow, the miserable people at last awaken to a sense of their infinite need of God. Their world has collapsed, society is a chaos, their pride has been humbled to the dust, their power has been broken to pieces, their money has been of no avail to stem the tide of destruction; they have now to face the ultimate realities, which in the heyday of their prosperity they

so conveniently ignored; and now they would give anything—if they had anything to give—to know what the God whom they have so long neglected would have them to do. They would do anything and go anywhere to hear a true word of the Lord. That will be a more terrible famine than the famine for bread—the day when the soul learns how lean it is, but cannot find its way to the Bread and the Water of Life. "Behold, I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Very vivid is Amos's picture of those desperate men, disillusioned at last, staggering across the land, across the world, in search of a message which they are doomed never to find. And why? Because they stifled the voices of the prophets who told them the truth. They said to the servants of God who struck home to their consciences, who

> "Read each wound, each weakness clear,
> And struck their finger on the place,
> And said, 'Thou ailest here, and here!'"

—they said to these men "Prophesy not" (ii. 12). They had spurned Amos himself, and contemptuously told him to take himself away—himself and his message—to those who would welcome it (vii. 12). So now that the prophets have been ignored, dismissed, persecuted, slain, there is no one to whom they can go; and that is famine and thirst indeed. How essentially true all this is, albeit expressed in ancient form—that those who deliberately and persistently reject some messenger or truth or blessing of God, may find some day to their infinite sorrow that it is beyond their reach, though they seek it carefully with tears.

If the prophet has failed them, much more surely shall the priest. Indeed it is he and the external superficial religion which he represents, that has largely contributed to the ruin of the people. The foolish devotees in the popular places of worship, where God is so gravely misunderstood and dishonoured, hope to be saved by their professions of fidelity. But those who rejected the prophets shall not be saved by the

priests. "They shall fall, never to rise again."

No fate seems to Amos too terrible for the cheat and the swindler. Earthquake, darkness, famine, thirst, abandonment, despair—such is the destiny reserved for the man or the nation that has no code of business honour, or that, for filthy gain, sets the eternal laws of commercial morality at defiance. "They shall fall and never rise again." Has this warning, uttered so long ago by Amos, been yet really laid to heart? Are there not still multitudes who imagine that, having cheated men, they can cheat God also?

AMOS IX.

DARK AND DAWN.

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord Jehovah are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; save that I will not utterly destroy" (ix. 8).

Four visions of destruction, each more terrible than the one before it, have already passed before the eyes of Amos, and been set by him before our eyes in his inimitably vivid way; but the most terrible of all is yet to come. It is a vision of truly titanic power. In the temple, whose courts were crowded with infatuated worshippers, Amos saw the Lord standing beside the altar—ominous sight: for the people who there, of all places, must have felt most secure, had denied Him the service for which He supremely cared—the service of an honourable public and private life, gentle and just in all its relations; and beside the altar,

reeking with their foolish sacrifices, stands the mighty God whom they have insulted, ready to destroy them. Suddenly across the crowded courts rings out the dreadful word *Smite*, addressed by the Lord to some unseen angelic minister of vengeance. A blow from his puissant arm shatters the columns which support the roof; columns and roof come crashing down upon the heads of the worshippers, most of whom are buried beneath the ruins—happy they! for their end, if it has been violent, has at least been speedy. But far more awful is the fate of those who survive; and Amos here surpasses himself in the grim power with which he delineates their futile efforts to escape the inescapable wrath of God. How thoroughly this prophet must have loathed the worship of his time, wedded as it was to a cruel, wicked, immoral social life, comes out in this vision of destruction, which falls upon the very church itself, despite its venerable age and sacred associations, and annihilates the worshippers in the midst of their zealous exercises. If the civic, the social, the political

life is rotten, then church, worship, priest, altar, rite, ceremony will not avail to stay the uplifted hand of the avenging angel who has received the command from God to smite.

The vision is one of a judgment from which there can be no escape. Amos has repeatedly expressed in weird and graphic language the impossibility of evading the divine judgment. The swiftest can neither outrun nor outride it (ii. 15). "It is as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him" (v. 19). But never has he expressed himself so terribly as here. "Not one of them shall flee away, and not one of them shall escape." In their mad efforts to escape, Amos pictures the survivors as digging their way down through the ground to the under-world, where Jehovah, as they suppose, has no jurisdiction, and where they may feel safe. But, ah! there is no escape from God. "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold! Thou art there." He has jurisdiction in the world

below as surely as in the world above. His arm is long: it can stretch across the universe, and down to the depths of the nether world, to lay hold of the oppressors and the hypocrites. And though those unhappy wretches, in their desperate efforts to escape, should reach the under-world, as, indeed, they never can, "even thence," says Jehovah, "shall My hand take them."

From the deepest depths the prophet pictures them as mounting to the highest heights; climbing, in their wild despair, from the nether world, which yields them no refuge, to the heights of heaven. But there they will fare worse, if possible; there they will be even more surely caught: for the God from whom they are fleeing is the God of heaven: that is—so to speak—His home. "And though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down." Brought down again to this world by that dread irresistible Hand, they make with what speed they may for the lofty Carmel which stands up so proudly and gracefully near the shore of the sea, and they seek to hide them-

selves in its dense forests and its welcome, tortuous caves. But no forest is so dense and no cave so dark and tortuous as to shelter from the all-seeing eye: "And though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence."

Hell, heaven, earth affords no shelter: what of the sea? So we are to picture the poor silly victims of this inexorable pursuit as throwing themselves from the top of Carmel into the Mediterranean Sea, in the desperate hope that there they may find rest. But no! The Lord of hosts has His ministers everywhere. The sea is His, and He made it, and the monsters there have to do His pleasure. So, though the sinners should descend to the very floor of the sea, "and hide themselves there from My sight, thence will I command the great sea serpent, and it shall bite them." Though they run across the universe, they will be seized, bitten, devoured at the last (cf. v. 19). Anywhere, anywhere, away from the gaze of His searching eye, and the reach of His omnipotent hand: but there is no escape in all the world from

the infinite God and the operation of His inexorable laws.

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold! Thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall Thy hand lead me,
And Thy right hand shall hold me."

The thought of the omnipresence of God, which to the Psalmist was such a source of comfort and joy, becomes, when interpreted by the righteous imagination of Amos, almost more than we can bear. The gracious hand that leads and holds the Psalmist, becomes the terrible hand that seizes the sinner for judgment. It is Amos's grimly magnificent way of saying that for the man or the society that flouts the dictates of conscience, honour, morality, pity, there can be, in the end, nothing but ruin, irretrievable and inescapable. How shall we escape destruction, if we dash ourselves against the solid walls of the City of God?

The doom which Amos has just painted in such fierce colours is, expressed in terms of historical experience, that of political extinction and exile. This he has hinted at again and again; as, for example, in his denunciation of the worship of Gilgal (v. 5), or in the plain declaration with which he had parted from Amaziah on the day of their ever memorable conflict, that Israel would assuredly be driven from her own land into exile (vii. 17). The people, over whose heads hang the awful menaces of Amos, console themselves with the reflection that if the worst should come to the worst, and they should really be driven into exile, at any rate there they would be safe. The implacable Jehovah would surely be satisfied with that: He would not follow them there. Yes, says the remorseless Amos: He will follow you with His sharp, avenging sword even into exile. "And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them."

Death and destruction, whichever way they

turn. It is too terrible: nay, it is false, they shout. For we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, that the eyes of our God are continually upon us. True, retorts Amos, His eyes are upon you—but for evil, not for good. He ruthlessly tears from them every article of the creed which they had so jealously cherished: at least he annihilates their interpretation of it. Of that creed no article was more firmly believed than that Israel was Jehovah's privileged people. In a sense that was true (iii. 2), but not in their sense. Israel had been uniquely endowed (ii. 11), but that did not mean that she was the darling of God. God has no favourites, His secret is for them that fear Him. The God who had called and endowed Israel for her great world task was the God of all the world. One nation was as dear to Him as another: all were within His care, all had a place in His purpose. "And as for you," says the stern, impartial prophet, "are ye not as the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?"—no more important, no better, no dearer, than the black

men on the banks of the Nile. At one stroke Amos smites through their boasted prerogative by this comparison with the negroes—a comparison which must have stung them to the quick with a sense of humiliation and insult. Indignantly they remind the audacious prophet of the exodus, that wonderful experience at the beginning of their national history which even Amos himself had admitted to be conclusive proof of the love of God (ii. 10, iii. 1). "Yes," retorts Amos, "but do not deceive yourselves: other nations had their exodus too. I did indeed bring Israel up out of the land of Egypt, but it was I, too, no less, who brought the Philistines from Crete, and the Syrians from Kir." The God for whom Amos pleads is the God of all history, not of Hebrew history only: He is behind all the great world movements, the migrations of the peoples contribute to His purpose, and are ultimately determined and effected by Him.

What a magnificent conception of God must the prophet have had who could speak thus

of Him, and who could so boldly challenge the national pride which had dared to identify the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Israel! We, too, who have sometimes spoken as if the kingdom and the cause of God were indissolubly associated with the British Empire, may do well to listen, with chastened hearts, to the challenge of Amos, "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me?" and to remind ourselves that the only empire that will live is that which seeks good and not evil, which consciously moves along the line of the divine purpose and seeks to be an adumbration of that kingdom of God which is not eating and drinking and victory and territory, but righteousness and peace. It is everlastingly true, as Amos told his astonished people, that the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

At this point the message of the book suddenly and completely changes. Denunciation and threat now merge in hope and promise. The contrasted messages meet in the eighth verse: "I will destroy the

kingdom from off the face of the earth, save that I will not utterly destroy it." It is as if we had emerged from a tunnel, with its crashing and its roar, its smoke and thick darkness, out upon a smiling and far-stretching landscape. The prospect opened for us by the last few verses is one of great beauty. The land is to be blessed with supernatural fertility. No more youths and maidens fainting for thirst (viii. 13), no more fire devouring the great deep (vii. 4), no more blasting and mildew, no more plagues of locusts devouring the gardens and vines and fig trees and olive trees (iv. 9); but, in the days that are coming, the ploughman shall overtake the reaper—so rapid will be the growth; and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed—so abundant will be the vintage; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt with it—dissolved, as it were, in the streams that pour down from the vineyards upon their sides. Better still, the ruins would be built as in the days of old. Out of the ashes of the cities that had been burned and laid waste

would rise nobler cities, inherited by a happy and prosperous people, who would regain their ancient territory, plant gardens and eat the fruit of them, and live evermore in peace and security, undisturbed by any haunting fear of attack; for they had the Lord's own promise, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them."

These coming days are so unlike that other day announced by Amos, which was to be thick darkness, without a streak of light across it (v. 20); this vista of populous cities and lovely gardens and happy faces is so unlike the destruction that crashes through the rest of the book in image after image; this manifest delight in the vineyards and their wine is so unlike the horror manifested elsewhere of the peril that streamed from the vine-clad hills; this seeming satisfaction with a merely material prosperity is so unlike the prophet's passionate and reiterated appeal for the establishment of justice in human society, that many scholars find it impossible to be-

lieve that the last few verses can have come from his pen. They are content to let the book end with the terrible words, "I will destroy you from off the face of the earth." If Amos modified that message, then, they tell us, the less Amos he.

This is not the place to discuss that question. Enough here to say that, whether the words are Amos's or not, they have a perfect right to stand in his book: indeed, without them the book would be incomplete as a revelation of the divine heart. The last word of God can never be destruction. The old order of society is swept away, that it may give place to another and a fairer. The ninth and tenth verses of the last chapter contain a precious truth which must not be forgotten, that the fierce discipline to which the nation is to be subjected is but a sifting, in which not the least kernel of good grain will fall upon the ground. All that is best in the world's experience will be conserved and transmitted to the future days. The living God would not be God, if His purpose were to be ultimately frustrated. So

we face the future with good hope, believing in some better thing to be, and remembering that, through all social and political change the new Jerusalem is slowly, but surely, emerging.

The lesson which Amos proclaimed with such elemental power is that social injustice is the way to national ruin : that sin of all kinds—the wronging of the poor, the exploitation of the helpless, the selfish disregard of public interests, the absorption in pleasure, the practice of fraud in business, the abandonment of personal honour, the insincere worship of God, or the forgetfulness of Him —carries with it inexorable and inevitable penalties. For these things, unrepented of and unforsaken, a day of retribution is coming, and "I will not turn it back." This is a stern gospel but a wholesome one, worth laying to heart by this and every age. The ideal for which Amos pled so passionately is that of a justly ordered society, through which the spirit of fair play and brotherhood will flow unimpeded like the waves of the sea. Every generation which

resolutely faces its social problems in the spirit of Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, will bring humanity a little nearer that blessed consummation when God shall be all in all.

APPENDIX.

List of Books for Study.

The foregoing pages attempt to convey, by a consecutive presentation of the book of Amos, some impression of the majestic personality of the man, and of the power and directness of his message. In an expository treatment of this kind, many important questions are necessarily ignored: with regard, for example, to the original order of the various oracles—whether they are continuous or fragmentary, and frequently displaced—with regard again to the authenticity of the references to Judah (*e.g.* ii. 4, 5), or of the doxologies (iv. 13, v. 8, 9, ix. 5, 6), or the epilogue (ix. 8–15), and various other disputed verses or paragraphs. Textual and metrical questions had also to be passed over. A few deviations from the text of the English Bible (Authorized or Revised) rest upon highly

probable emendations which are almost universally accepted by scholars. It did not seem worth while to deal even incidentally or allusively with the critical problems raised by the book—the proper place for such discussion is a commentary; but those who can read between the lines will usually detect the conclusions which commend themselves to me. It is altogether probable that the criticism of the future will substantially restore to Amos verses whose authenticity has been widely questioned. But the controverted matters are relatively so few as not seriously to affect the broad and massive impression made by the first and surely one of the greatest of the literary prophets. There is probably no Old Testament writer whose mind, or at least whose personality, we know so intimately.

Fundamental to any thorough appreciation of the message of Amos is, of course, an intimate familiarity with the words of the book itself, which should, in the first instance, be read without extraneous helps of any kind, partly that the reader may get an independent impression of the book for

himself, and partly because in this way he discovers its difficulties and perplexities at first hand, and thus learns exactly what his needs are, when he comes to consult other books.

He has not travelled far till he recognizes the importance of at least a rudimentary knowledge of the history of the times. The book of Kings affords him little help, as the reign of Jeroboam II., into which Amos's prophecy falls, is there disposed of in a few verses, which tell us very little (2 Kings xiv. 23–29). The prophets themselves constitute our most important Hebrew source for a knowledge of the life and history of the times. This has been in recent years greatly augmented by the evidence of the Assyrian inscriptions. The intelligent student of Hebrew prophecy must furnish himself with some modern history of Israel, which gathers up the evidence from these various sources. A very clear, readable, and reliable volume is C. F. Kent's *History of the Hebrew People*, "The Divided Kingdom" (Smith, Elder & Co., 6s.). Brief, but competent, is

the treatment in R. L. Ottley's *Short History of the Hebrews* (Cambridge University Press). Equally good, and somewhat fuller, is F. J. Foakes Jackson's *Biblical History of the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Heffer), which has been recently adapted as *Biblical History for Junior Forms* (2s. 6d.). C. F. Kent's *Historical Bible*, in 6 volumes (Hodder & Stoughton; 5s. net each), "makes it possible to study the character, work, and message of each great prophet, sage, or apostle in the full light of the events and conditions amidst which he lived and laboured." The period of Amos is covered by vol. iii., *The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah*. A very attractive, inexpensive, and popularly written volume, with important and valuable illustrations, entitled *The Story of Israel and Judah*, is from the pen of H. J. Chaytor (Blackie & Son). Wellhausen's brilliant sketch, which originally appeared as the art. "Israel," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, is published in book form as *Sketch of the History of Israel and Judah*, by A. & C. Black. H. P. Smith's *Old Testament History*, in the International Theological

Library series (T. & T. Clark ; 12s.), is more elaborate than any of these.

Besides an acquaintance with the history, it is well to have some general conception of prophecy before entering on this special study. Unusually interesting and suggestive is the volume on *The Hebrew Prophet*, by L. W. Batten (Macmillan), which deals, for example, with the prophet's credentials and call, his relation to the State, the Church, etc. The development of Hebrew religion as a conflict of prophetic with natural and ceremonial religion has been skilfully depicted by Westphal in *The Law and the Prophets*, translated by Du Pontet (Macmillan ; 8s. 6d. net). For one who wishes to discover the facts inductively for himself and to reach his own conclusions, there could be no better guide than the late W. R. Harper's *Prophetic Element in the Old Testament* (Chicago University Press ; $1.00). It includes an inductive study of Amos on pp. 98–111. A useful book, designed to simplify the study of prophecy, is *The Hebrew Prophets*, or Patriots and Leaders of Israel, by G. L. Chamberlin

(University of Chicago Press; $1.00). The late A. B. Davidson's article on "Prophecy and Prophets," in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. iv. (T. & T. Clark), is very complete and admirable, indeed not less useful than his volume on *Old Testament Prophecy* (T. & T. Clark). There is a fine presentation of the nature and development of Hebrew prophecy in Kautzsch's great article on the "Religion of Israel," in the extra volume of Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 671–715. C. H. Cornill's *The Prophets of Israel* is a very able and illuminating sketch, scientific but popular (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co.; $1.00). W. G. Jordan's *Prophetic Ideas and Ideals* (Revell Co.) is a particularly living and suggestive book. Farrar's *The Minor Prophets*, in the "Men of the Bible" series, is very satisfactory.

The text of Amos, arranged metrically, will be found, along with the other prophets, in C. F. Kent's *Student's Old Testament*, vol. iii. (Hodder & Stoughton; 12s. net). The study of the prophets is facilitated by Buchanan Blake's careful arrangement of the prophecy

into brief paragraphs with appropriate titles, in his *How to Read the Prophets*, part i. (T. & T. Clark), which also contains a brief sketch of the prophecy and a glossary of difficult references. A suggestive English paraphrase (which has often the value of a commentary), with brief introductions, appears in Sanders and Kent's *Messages of the Earlier Prophets* (London: Jas. Clarke & Co.; 3s. 6d.).

For a general introduction to Amos, S. R. Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (T. & T. Clark; 12s.), or (briefer) J. E. McFadyen's *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s.), may be consulted. A very complete and thorough discussion is presented in W. Robertson Smith's *Prophets of Israel*, Lecture III. (A. & C. Black; 6s. net). There is a careful and sympathetic study of Amos on pp. 123-154 of the first vol. of G. G. Findlay's very useful series, *The Books of the Prophets in their historical succession* (London: Charles Kelly; 2s. 6d.); also in A. F. Kirkpatrick's *Doctrine of the Prophets*, Lecture IV.

(Macmillan ; 6s.). There is a penetrating study of "The Prophet Amos" in the late A. B. Davidson's *Biblical and Literary Essays* (pp. 105–138). In the chapter on Amos (iv.) in his *Religion of Israel under the Kingdom*, Kerr Lectures (T. & T. Clark ; 7s. 6d. net), Dr. A. C. Welch offers a fresh, profound, and powerful treatment of the prophet's mind and message.

Of detailed commentaries the most helpful to ordinary students will be S. R. Driver's "Joel and Amos," in the Cambridge Bible series : much more exhaustive and elaborate is W. R. Harper's vol. on "Amos and Hosea," in the International Critical Commentary series (T. & T. Clark). Other good commentaries are by H. G. Mitchell — "Amos, an Essay in Exegesis" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), and by R. F. Horton ("The Minor Prophets, Hosea—Micah") in the Century Bible (T. C. & E. C. Jack ; 2s. 6d. net). A very useful treatment of Amos, arranged as short and simple daily studies, will be found in *The Work and Teaching of the Earlier Prophets*, by C. F. Kent and R. S.

Smith (Young Men's Christian Association Press, New York); and on a smaller scale, in *Studies in the Prophets of Israel*, by R. H. Walker and R. B. Miller (Eaton & Mains, New York).

Louis Wallis, in his *Sociological Study of the Bible* (University of Chicago Press, $1.50; Cambridge University Press, 6s. net), presents a fresh and brilliant treatment of the rise and development of the social problem in Israel, which throws much incidental light on Amos. In *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. i. (*Expositor's Bible*; Hodder & Stoughton), Principal G. A. Smith has illuminated the prophet's times and message, in his own inimitable way, with a wealth of eloquence, insight, and imagination.

There is much important foreign literature on Amos: the previous list is strictly confined to English books and translations. Of these, the beginner should furnish himself at least with Driver's commentary, Kent's or Chaytor's history, and G. A. Smith's exposition.

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